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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, March 19, 2019

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, March 19, 2019

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

The Speaker: Pursuant to subsection 79.13 of the Parliament of Canada Act, it is my duty to present to the House a report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer entitled “PBO Work Plan for 2019-20”.

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to eight petitions.

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

TRANSPORT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to present, in both official languages, the 28th report of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, entitled “Assessing the Impact of Aircraft Noise in the Vicinity of Major Canadian Airports”.

I want to thank all of the committee members for their cooperation. In my riding of Humber River—Black Creek airport noise is a significant problem, as it is in Calgary and at many other airports across Canada. We need to look at it. This report hopefully gives some guidance to the department in terms of implementing some of these recommendations.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move that the 51st report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, presented on Thursday, October 4, 2018, be concurred in.

It is certainly an honour to stand and speak to this today.

Before I commence, I would like to state that I will be sharing my time with the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

It is a very interesting report. It goes back roughly 14 or 15 years, from now to the previous Liberal government and the decisions that were not made in terms of the upkeep and maintenance of the bridge. As the bridge was aging, there were needed repairs and a new business plan associated with it, yet the federal government failed to do anything at that point.

Over time, it was then determined that the federal government, along with other shareholders in the area, engage with none other than SNC-Lavalin to work out the design of the Champlain Bridge. I know members are wondering if that is the same SNC-Lavalin that we thought might be talked about in committee today, if there were not a bunch of members of the committee of a certain political persuasion, specifically Liberal, who were trying to shut down that procedure in that committee. However, coming back to this, yes, it is the same SNC-Lavalin.

We certainly have the opportunity now, as we are looking at this committee report, to reflect on the work that SNC has been doing and we are finally able to talk about SNC and what has been happening. We know, based on what has transpired over the past couple of months, that SNC got into some legal difficulties, we will call them that, which were related to some foreign dignitaries, if I could even use that word, who were coming into this country. We know that there was a request for an offer of a sweetheart deal to avoid prosecution.

What we saw transpire was that the former attorney general stood up for the Canadian justice system, doing what she believed was right at the time, which was to essentially act as the person who was going to stand up for the rule of law. Unfortunately, we heard at committee that members of the current government, right up to the Prime Minister, were asking her to go against what she believed was the right thing to do with respect to the protection of the rule of law and the protection of our democracy as a whole, and to help out this same company that was doing the design and engineering on the Champlain Bridge.

Routine Proceedings

Since all of that has come to light, we saw the former attorney general resign, based on, and I am going to paraphrase here, not being able to state publicly that there was confidence in the Prime Minister and the government anymore. Subsequently, another minister who was very senior in aboriginal affairs and the treasury resigned due to this scandal and these issues surrounding SNC-Lavalin. Additionally, we have had the principal secretary to the Prime Minister, his closest aid, step down because of this scandal involving SNC-Lavalin. Following that, we now understand that there is a pending resignation from the Clerk of the Privy Council.

This does not sound like there is nothing to see here. If there were nothing to see, we would not have multiple cabinet ministers resigning, three cabinet shuffles in one month, the senior-most public servant stepping away, and at the same time, the Prime Minister's chief adviser, who has been friends with him since university, also resigning.

If there were nothing to see here and there was no need for the justice committee and others to look into it, if there was no need for a public inquiry, then I am sure that somebody could stand up in the House and explain all of these things in a very coherent manner. Unfortunately, we have not seen that and all of this is really just a tornado, a hurricane, around this original SNC proposal for a deferred prosecution.

We know that Canadians are looking at this and saying, "How is it that SNC should be given a sweetheart deal to avoid prosecution, when the average Canadian is left down and out?" As Canadians, they believe that they have to live by the law, that they have to follow the rules, and if they do so and work very hard, there is a potential for success. Meanwhile, we have the Prime Minister, the chief adviser to the Prime Minister and the chief public servant all looking at the potential for big business, SNC-Lavalin, who has done the Champlain Bridge design, to get a sweetheart deal and not have to live by the laws of the land.

How do we explain to our children that if they are just an average little one and go out and do something wrong, they have to abide by the law, but if one is SNC-Lavalin, if one is big business, if one has a lot of friends in the Liberal Party of Canada, if one lobbies the heck out of them day in and day out, if one hires the right former public servants to come and work in one's shop, then one can actually influence the Prime Minister of the country to influence the law in one's favour? That is just not cool. It is not something that our children should be learning or understanding. They should be learning that there are laws and we need to abide by them. They should be learning that there are consequences each and every time we make decisions.

The reality is that what the Prime Minister, the cabinet, the senior public servants and senior advisers have done is that they have created one set of rules for the rich and the famous and they have created another set of rules for the rest of Canadians. Can members imagine if one of our young people was perhaps arrested for something and they had the same resources to lobby the Prime Minister and those around him? Of course they would, but they do not, and the idea that we are all the same under the law needs to be enforced. That is the actual reason, that is the crux of why the former attorney general felt so compelled to resign from cabinet after the shuffle, understanding that what was coming next, because of the

conversations she had with the principal secretary, the chair of the Privy Council, with all of those around the Prime Minister and with the Prime Minister himself, would likely result in this sweetheart deal being given and the rule of law and our democracy being trampled.

I know that SNC has certainly been involved in a lot of contracts related to the federal government. Like I said, the Champlain Bridge is one of them. However, at no point should that relationship influence the processes of the law, the ideals of our country. At no point should the Prime Minister be able to skirt what is actually written in stone in this country's constitution, what is actually written in stone in terms of the public good and the public trust.

We know that trust has been lost and it has not been lost in the rule of law. The people's trust in the rule of law, the people's trust in our democracy is strong. Their trust in the Prime Minister, their trust in the government has been waning for a long time, but this has sort of put it to a whole new level. They now understand that the Prime Minister is actually willing to change the law in certain ways to allow his friends, who are rich and famous, who are influential, who are big business, who are the corporate world, to get away with things that are just incredibly terrible.

I do not even want to go into the original issue in terms of the exchange of money from SNC to the person I will very loosely refer to as a dignitary coming to our country and what those funds were used for, because it is despicable and it is wrong. We should be prosecuting to the fullest extent of the law and not providing a sweetheart deal because these people at SNC-Lavalin have big relationships and big friends in this big government.

● (1010)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the people of Montreal were waiting for many years to see the replacement of the Champlain Bridge. Stephen Harper and the Conservative government failed the people of Montreal and thereby the people of Quebec, and in fact all Canadians, on many fronts. This is a good example of how the Harper government could not get the job done. With this government, we have seen historic investments in infrastructure in every region of our country. The Champlain Bridge is a good example.

The Conservatives, once again, have taken this day to attempt to bump debate on government legislation, Bill C-92, which is critically important legislation. In my own riding of Winnipeg North, hundreds of children are in foster care. This is about reconciliation, and the Conservatives continue to want to filibuster on what is important legislation that needs to be debated.

Why does the member opposite feel that the Conservative Party is entitled to deny Canadians good, solid legislation and debate while it tries to play politics on the issue of SNC-Lavalin, when his own leader and that party have met with SNC-Lavalin? He did not make reference to that either.

Routine Proceedings

•(1015)

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Speaker, I find it incredible that the member just asked me a question about denying legislation to the Canadian people and denying debate on the same day the Liberal government is shutting down the justice committee and denying the people of Canada the opportunity to see the truth, to understand the corruption and to know why these people are stepping down. It is like dominoes over there. Canadians want to know why, but the Liberals are shutting it down.

Why does the member not look in the mirror first and then come back and ask that question later?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a comment and a question.

I have heard the Prime Minister and the Liberals go on about how this whole SNC-Lavalin deal was about Canadian jobs. I do not know if members recall that I am an engineer. In fact, I was a business director in charge of selling engineering and construction services in Quebec and was in direct competition with SNC-Lavalin. I can say that if SNC-Lavalin loses the ability to bid on government contracts, it will not mean a loss of jobs. It will mean that Stantec, Cegertec and WorleyParsons will get those contracts, and all the engineers will migrate to where the projects are. Therefore, that is a total red herring. This scandal was all about elections and protecting the Liberals.

It seems to me that with high-ranking members of SNC-Lavalin being involved in the Liberal Party, there is a huge conflict of interest here. Could the member comment on that?

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Speaker, I just want to put straight an earlier point made by the member who previously asked a question. It was actually the Martin government that first had this issue of the Champlain Bridge and failed to do anything on it. I just want to put that straight.

In terms of the connection between the Liberal Party and SNC-Lavalin, it is everywhere. We know it is everywhere. As we look forward, these are the questions we need to have answered and explained to us. Unfortunately, the Liberal Party is putting its own ideas, the Prime Minister's future, the Prime Minister's job and the members' own jobs ahead of the best interests of the country.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am deeply concerned, because the OECD anti-bribery unit said that it—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I just want to interrupt the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay for a second.

I am trying to hear his question, because he is at the other end of the chamber, and with all the chatter going on, I am having a hard time, so I would imagine that everyone else is. Everyone wants to hear his question, so we will let him continue now.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, everyone knows I am a shrinking violet, and I am very pleased that you stood up to defend my right to speak in this House.

The question we are dealing with is that the OECD anti-bribery unit has put the Liberal government on notice. One of the things it said it would watch very closely is the work of the justice committee.

The Prime Minister's Office promised a robust investigation, and now the Liberals have shut it down.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague about the credibility of a Prime Minister who has burned through his reconciliation agenda, his feminist agenda, his open and accountable government and now his international agenda to continue to pursue this deferred prosecution for his friends at SNC-Lavalin.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague what he thinks this Prime Minister is willing to do to burn the credibility of the Liberal members to get this deal done.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that what we have seen is a Prime Minister who is willing to help his friends, in terms of big business, at the expense of pretty much everybody around him: the former attorney general, the chair of the Privy Council, his principal secretary.

I know, because we are seeing it in our offices, that all the Liberal members across the country are hearing the same thing from Canadians, which is that the Prime Minister has lost their trust. The Liberals need to get the government back on track. Unfortunately, they are not doing the right work.

•(1020)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's Office is burning, and the call for help has gone out. External lawyers have been hired, but no one seems to be able to put out the flames. Unbelievable.

Six weeks have passed since The Globe and Mail revealed that sustained and undue pressure had been put on the former attorney general by the Prime Minister's Office, the Prime Minister himself and his staff. For six weeks, the Prime Minister has been refusing to do what needs to be done, namely to bring the whole SNC-Lavalin affair into the light of day and let everyone involved speak in order to maintain Canadians' trust in our institutions.

What is at stake here is the relationship of trust between Canadians, their government and their judicial institutions. That is no small thing. This government, the Prime Minister, the members of cabinet and the Liberal members are desperately trying to downplay this crisis and sweep it under the rug, but there is no rug big enough to hide this dust.

Sadly, that is what is happening. For the past six weeks, this government has been trying to cover up the truth about the SNC-Lavalin affair. It is deliberately and repeatedly attempting to convince the public that absolutely nothing happened. That is the most peculiar part. I have never seen anything like this before in my life. I am young, but I am sure that my more experienced colleagues here have never seen such a thing happen in the House or any other legislature. Never have so many people resigned over something that allegedly never happened. That is the truth. That is what happened. That is what the government is trying to get us to believe. The four most influential and important people in the Prime Minister's Office and in the Prime Minister's entourage all decided to resign, but he says nothing happened and everything is normal.

Routine Proceedings

They say it is business as usual and these things happen, but that is not true. These things do not happen; they should not happen. Anyway, they are not things that have happened, but I think they will happen more and more under the Liberal government if we get stuck with it for another few years. Unfortunately for the Liberals, that is not going to happen.

The former attorney general, who was shuffled out to Veterans Affairs, the Treasury Board president, and the Prime Minister's senior adviser and best friend—according to the newspapers, anyway; I do not know the nature of their relationship—all resigned, and now the Clerk of the Privy Council is following suit. All four resignations are connected to the SNC-Lavalin affair, but more importantly, they stem from the lack of public confidence in Canada's judicial system. That is what we are talking about here.

How can the public trust a government that has lost four people because they no longer have confidence in it? How can the public be sure that the government will not interfere in other cases? How can the public trust a government that has already done too much to try covering up what really happened? Canadians no longer have confidence in this government.

Everyone has a sense of what an MP's life is like. On weekends, we travel around, we meet with constituents, and we stock up on groceries because we need food in the fridge too. This weekend, my wife and I were getting groceries, and for the first time since I was elected in 2015, I could not finish my shopping because people kept stopping me to talk.

● (1025)

They wanted me to know how shocked they are by the attitude of the Prime Minister and his office. They want to get the full truth, now that they know for sure that the former attorney general was not allowed to speak. That was the first time this has happened to me since I was elected in 2015.

People have lost confidence in the Prime Minister and in this government. People I have never met before are stopping me in the street to let me know that. People are telling us, unprompted, to keep pressing the issue. They are telling us that they absolutely want to get the full truth. That happened to me last weekend at the grocery store, at a restaurant and at several other places. After watching this cover-up for six weeks, people are sick of the government refusing to tell Canadians the whole truth.

The truth is that the former attorney general has more to say. I will come back to her testimony. It is important that people know, because the Liberals are going to accuse us of playing politics with this issue. Playing politics is what they are doing. They are the ones who refuse to tell Canadians what really went on in this whole affair.

Why should the former attorney general appear again? Let me read a few excerpts from her testimony.

The deputy leader of the official opposition asked her the following: “For clarity, can you tell us what you discussed with the Prime Minister at your meetings in Vancouver on February 11?” The former attorney general said, “I cannot.”

The deputy leader of the official opposition then asked, “Can you tell us why you've resigned from cabinet?” The former attorney general said, “I cannot.”

The deputy leader of the official opposition continued, asking, “Can you tell us what was discussed with the cabinet on February 19?” The former attorney general said, “I cannot.”

Finally, the deputy leader of the official opposition asked this very important question: “If the issues surrounding your ability to communicate these conversations to this committee were resolved and you were able to be released from cabinet confidence or from privilege, would you be willing to return to this committee and give us testimony again?” The former attorney general said, “Yes.”

The former attorney general has things to say and Canadians want to hear it. The Canadians I talked to last week at the grocery store and at the restaurant want to hear what the former attorney general has to say. Canadians want the government to allow the former attorney general to speak once and for all.

We wanted to hear her testimony at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. The cover-up continued this morning when the Liberals decided to put an end to the justice committee's study of this matter. They put an end to the justice committee's supposedly independent study in order to prevent the former attorney general from telling her story.

They claim that she already testified for four hours, but the Prime Minister decided what she could and could not say. Her testimony could have lasted six hours, but she did not have the right to say what we wanted to hear. She did not have the right to give her version of the facts because the Prime Minister forbade her. That is what happened. Canadians want to know the truth, and they have a right to hear it.

I remind members that there were four resignations in the Liberal Party: the former attorney general, the president of the Treasury Board, the principal secretary and best friend of the Prime Minister, and the clerk of the Privy Council. Did they all resign for no reason?

We are not stupid. We know that they are hiding something. As long as we are able to rise to speak in the House, we will rise to speak for Canadians. We will do everything we can to get to the truth for Canadians.

● (1030)

[English]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague brought up the whole idea of the cover-up, but I want to talk about something that is really important in my community, and that is jobs.

The member knows about the bad announcement in Oshawa. The government is totally and completely incompetent. The Liberals say it is about jobs, but what did they do in the energy sector to save those jobs? They did absolutely nothing. What did they do in Oshawa to help save automotive jobs? They did absolutely nothing. They promised in November, almost four months ago, that they would have a plan, but they have been so consumed with their own corruption and scandals that we are seeing absolutely nothing else from the government.

Routine Proceedings

Local politicians and labour groups are working together to keep jobs in place in Oshawa, but the Liberals are just concerned about their scandal. We are going to have a budget presented today, and it is going to be about further distractions.

How far does my colleague think the Prime Minister will go to save his own job and forget about Canadian jobs?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, for the past six weeks, the Prime Minister has shown that nothing is going to get in his way. Nothing can stop his cover-up.

We can expect that when the budget is tabled this afternoon, billions of dollars that we do not have and that will be borrowed are going to be handed out to continue the cover-up. Is that going to help workers in Oshawa? I hope so, but I am not convinced. It turns out that the only jobs at risk in this matter are the jobs of the people around the Prime Minister. Four people in his entourage have already lost their jobs. The Prime Minister is terrified that he is next. The only job he is really worried about is his own. When we asked questions about the SNC-Lavalin jobs, we were told outright that no study showed that SNC-Lavalin jobs were at risk. We know that the company still has contracts worth billions of dollars with municipalities, other provinces and private businesses, and we know that SNC-Lavalin has an agreement with the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec to keep its headquarters in Quebec until 2024.

The cover-up continues. They are now making up facts that cannot even be proven.

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering what happens now. This seems like the sponsorship scandal only bigger because of the amount of dollars involved. The one likely to follow this is the case of Vice-Admiral Mark Norman, where again the Liberals will not release the documents needed so the second-highest commander in the Royal Canadian Navy can get a fair trial. This is being done to protect their own people in cabinet so they do not get drawn into it any deeper than they are.

Yesterday we found out that the Liberals hired Anne McLellan, of all people, to provide legal advice and look into this. She is a fundraiser for the party and she was actually part of the sponsorship scandal. Summer is coming. I think the Liberals were hoping this would just go away. I would like to hear my colleague's response to that. Do you think it will actually away? What are you hearing from your constituents?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I will not give the answer. I am sure he does not want to hear my opinion on it, so I will let the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable answer.

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, if you would like to answer that question, I would be more than happy to give you the floor.

However, I do not want to put you in an embarrassing situation. They put themselves in an embarrassing situation by hiring a former Liberal minister to advise a Liberal prime minister on how to manage

a Liberal crisis in order to save the Liberal Party. I would not want to get you involved in that, and I understand why you are not commenting, Mr. Speaker. You are doing the right thing.

This scandal cannot be swept under the rug because there is no rug big enough to cover it up. That is the truth. Something this big cannot be covered up. We are talking about four resignations during a six-week crisis that the Liberals are incapable of managing. The Prime Minister's Office is in complete chaos. There are some extremely oversized egos in that office. They cannot agree on what to do. Meanwhile, the Liberals are not taking care of the affairs of the state. They are not taking care of jobs in Canada.

● (1035)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thought I would share with those who are following the debate some of the tactics being used by members of the Conservative Party, maybe in hopes they reflect on this. It is time they understand what Canadians really want from government, and even from opposition parties, and reflect on what is in the minds of Canadians. They should start focusing more attention on what is happening in the lives of Canadians in all regions of our country.

It is interesting that in one of the questions posed by the previous speaker, the government was accused of trying to change the channel by introducing a budget. The Government of Canada is introducing a budget. That happens on an annual basis. We have known for many months that the budget was coming. There is no channel-changing required. Canadians expect the federal government to bring forward a budget, and that is exactly what we are doing.

The Conservatives seem to be fixated, with only one focus. That focus, as I said yesterday, is all about personal attacks on people within the Government of Canada. That has been their cause from day one, and nothing has changed.

I can understand, as I said yesterday, why the Conservatives have been so preoccupied with that. Virtually from day one, this government has taken initiatives that are bettering the lives of Canadians. We have seen a Conservative Harper opposition, because for all intents and purposes there has been no change, attack the government. I think Stephen Harper is in the lobby there somewhere giving the Conservatives direction as to what they should do. Some of my colleagues say not to factor out Doug Ford. Yes, Doug Ford has also had a great influence on the current Conservative leader.

This was so even in the days when I was in opposition. Members only need to read the members' statements when the Conservatives were in the government benches. Every other member's statement was critical of the leader of the then third party, the Liberal Party. Nothing has changed. I think it is in the DNA of the Conservatives that they have to be personally critical of the leader of the Liberal Party, who happens to be the Prime Minister today.

Mr. Mel Arnold: That's our job.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: The Conservatives say it is their job. They are heckling that it is their job to be critical of the leader of the Liberal Party. They have been consistently doing that, even before he became the leader of the Liberal Party.

Routine Proceedings

Canadians have already passed judgment on that issue.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I am going to stop the hon. parliamentary secretary. I want to remind everyone how the rules work. Someone speaks and someone asks questions. We cannot ask questions while someone is speaking. It makes things very difficult.

I will let the parliamentary secretary continue. I am sure the questions will stop, but they will start again and the parliamentary secretary will have a full 10 minutes for questions. We will get to a lot of people. Hon. members should stand up and we will recognize them when they want to ask questions. I am sure they will be relevant to what we are debating today.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, we already had that vote on Stephen Harper.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member knows the rules. There actually has to be some relevance. I have not heard the member mention the motion once. What he is talking about is not relevant to what is being discussed here this morning.

• (1040)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would remind the hon. parliamentary secretary that relevance is important. We are discussing Motion No. 464, a concurrence motion. I will let him continue, and I am sure he will bring it back. I would remind the hon. parliamentary secretary to stay on topic.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, members can count on it. I guess the NDP members are feeling somewhat neglected by my comments.

At the end of the day, Canadians had the opportunity to base their votes on the Harper-style tactics being used. They made that decision. In that decision and that election, they chose the opportunity to have a change in government that would actually see positive, progressive policies, whether it was legislation or budgetary measures, that would provide more hope and that would ultimately see Canada's economy do well, after many years of the Harper administration.

My colleague across the way asks how this is relevant. I believe people need to understand the tactics and the motives behind what the Conservatives are trying to do. They have consistently, even prior to the last federal election, made this a very personal thing against the Prime Minister. That is what this SNC-Lavalin issue, in good part, is about.

Things are going quite well economically. The Prime Minister made reference to 900,000-plus jobs in three and a half years. By working with Canadians—

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have to agree with my colleague from Timmins—James Bay. The hon. member is not addressing the issue of the Auditor General report or the report that came out of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. He is not addressing anything that is actually before the House.

He can make any rant he wants against opposition parties. I would agree with some of his comments about the Conservatives. However, he has to be relevant to what is before the House. He has shown no inclination so far to actually do that, to actually address the concurrence report that is before the House of Commons.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to direct the parliamentary secretary to be relevant to the discussion we are having.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would like to ask the hon. parliamentary secretary to maybe indicate how he is going to get back to a relevant topic or to the topic at hand. I will leave it with the parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, if my friend does not understand the relevance, there is a very strong direct connection as to why we are debating this issue today. If the member had been listening to the Conservative speakers, he would understand that it has been nothing but criticism toward the government with respect to SNC, and I am very clearly demonstrating that the official opposition, from virtually day one, has been consistently critical of the personalities within the Government of Canada. That is completely relevant to what we are talking about, and I would hope that the points of order, whether the previous ones or any in the future, will not be deducted from my time, because at the end of the day I do have a number of concerns that I think are critically important for members to be aware of.

This is one of the tactics that the Conservatives are using that I believe are not in the best interests of Canadians. When we talk about the manipulation that is being used by the Conservative Party, let me highlight it with respect to SNC. Conservatives talk about the justice committee, which I am going to get to. I am going to get to that, because that is all part of the tactics that the Conservative Party is using.

When we think of SNC and the Champlain Bridge, which is actually in the report, we need to realize that it was the former Conservative government that arrived at that agreement. It was the former Conservative government that initially got into the agreement with respect to the Champlain Bridge, yet now Conservative members are trying to give Canadians the impression that the Government of Canada has a special relationship with SNC and that is the reason that there is this agreement with regard to the Champlain Bridge. That is not true.

Yes, members of the government, including the Prime Minister's Office, have had dealings with SNC. That is not new. We all know that. We also know that the leader of the New Democratic Party and other New Democratic MPs also met with SNC. We also know that the leader of the Conservative Party has also met with SNC, as have many others.

The member across the way said that the leader of the official opposition met with SNC to tell him to take a hike. What about the 9,000 jobs and the pensions and those who are receiving money? Did the leader of the official opposition really tell SNC to take a hike?

Routine Proceedings

I think Canadians should be concerned that in the past Stephen Harper said “yes” to SNC and started the agreement, and now the leader of the official opposition has told SNC to take a hike, along with the 9,000 affiliated jobs. I think that maybe the justice committee should meet with the leader of the official opposition. Did he really take SNC to take a hike? I find that interesting.

We know that it is really important to invest in Canadian infrastructure. We have seen significant commitments by this government, historical commitments to invest in Canada's infrastructure, whether it is bridges in Quebec or water treatment in other jurisdictions. Even in Winnipeg North, we have seen significant dollars invested. Last summer I was walking down McGregor by Selkirk Avenue, where there is a lot of road reconstruction. We recognize the value of infrastructure dollars.

• (1045)

Companies in all regions of our country participate. I believe that SNC has jobs in the province of Manitoba. Once all is said and done, the people of Montreal will benefit from the Champlain Bridge through the support for SNC and other stakeholders. They have been waiting for it for many years. We now finally have a government that is seeing it through, even though, as I pointed out, Stephen Harper initiated it with SNC.

In addressing this motion, members opposite spent a great deal of time talking about the current situation with SNC and the Government of Canada. As we saw yesterday, the opposition members are solely focused on trying to prevent the government from being able to do the many other things that we could be doing, as they want to focus on SNC.

Some of the allegations that are made in the House are of considerable concern. Members talk a tough line on things such as the rule of law and make allegations against this government in terms of the independence of the judiciary. They need to reflect on the reality, because when I sat in opposition, I saw the Stephen Harper government introduce legislation that Conservatives knew full well was in contradiction of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but that did not prevent them from doing that.

What about the attempt by Stephen Harper to put into place a Supreme Court judge, Mr. Nadon? He had his knuckles rapped in commentary from legal opinions across the country that said he was interfering in the process.

There is an interesting quote in regard to that issue by John Ibbitson, who is the biographer of Stephen Harper. He described the “nadir” incident of the former prime minister by saying: “Not only—”

• (1050)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, I hate to interrupt my fellow Manitoban, but talking about Supreme Court appointments is clearly ridiculously off topic. It is not relevant to this debate, and I would ask you to direct the speaker to stay relevant to the topic.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would like to remind all the speakers who have been up and are about to be

up to be relevant. The topic we are debating today is “Report 4—Replacing Montréal's Champlain Bridge—Infrastructure Canada” of the 2018 spring report of the Auditor General of Canada. I remind the hon. parliamentary secretary of what we are debating, and hopefully everyone who will be speaking later is listening and will be reminded that this is what we will hopefully be debating and asking questions about.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it shows the sensitivity of the Conservatives when they have to reflect on their past performances inside the House. In this debate, the two previous Conservative speakers talked about SNC and serious allegations. Now when I challenge them on those allegations, we find that they are very uncomfortable, and justifiably so, because if we compare Stephen Harper and his administration on the issue of judicial independence to this government, it is ultimately night and day, with Harper being the darker side. A vast majority of individuals would recognize that. We only need to look at some of the appointments that were made or attempted under that administration.

I want to provide some thoughts in regard to the standing committees. It was not that long ago when there was a memo sent out by the Conservatives at the time. They wanted to deliberately obstruct committees. That is something that has not changed with the Conservative Party. If we want to get into the details of what is taking place here in Ottawa, I would summarize it by saying that the official opposition is continuing to follow the memo that was issued many years ago to deliberately obstruct committees.

Standing committees can contribute in a very valuable way to the proceedings of this House, and so can the proceedings that take place in this chamber. Preventing debates, such as debate on Bill C-92, is a disservice to Canadians. The Conservative opposition needs to get back on track and start thinking and acting on what is in the best interest of Canadians, as opposed to the best interest of the Conservative Party of Canada.

• (1055)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Questions and comments about the Champlain Bridge report, the hon. member for North Okanagan—Shuswap.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will try to keep this on the Champlain Bridge report, but the member opposite, the parliamentary secretary, has superfluous verbiage on this topic. Ten minutes of questions and answers on his 20-minute speech are not enough to cover the topics that he brought up during his intervention, and I hope other members here get a chance to question him on this.

The member talked about distraction and the attempts of this opposition party to distract from today's budget bill. I would suggest that perhaps today's budget is, hopefully, a distraction for the Liberals so that they can get away from the SNC-Lavalin issue that this member mentioned so much in his intervention. With the challenges that the government faces, over the past few weeks the Liberals have been continuously throwing out issue after issue, hoping that the public will pick up on these other issues and be distracted away from the corruption that seems to be apparent in the SNC-Lavalin issue.

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The member talked about infrastructure. We have heard numerous times from across the country that the infrastructure money that is promised, such as for this Champlain Bridge project, has not been flowing, because the government has not made it possible. It has thrown roadblocks in the way and it does not have the program up and running. I question where the parliamentary secretary is going with the distractions and tactics that he has been using in his long intervention here, when this opposition party is actually holding the government to account for its failures.

Does the parliamentary secretary feel confident in his Prime Minister when the rest of Canada and all Canadians are saying that they have lost trust in the current government and the Prime Minister?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that is just not the case. I do not believe for a moment that the Prime Minister has lost the confidence of Canadians.

I understand that the Conservative Party does not support our Prime Minister. It is the official opposition, and I guess that is to be expected. No matter how many times Conservatives repeat their spin on the issue, Canadians want us to debate the important issues we are facing today, such as jobs, health care, crime, safety and having a better, healthier environment. Those are the issues that are top of mind with Canadians. Because the government is doing relatively well on those points and so many others, the Conservatives choose to exaggerate an issue that has been properly vetted and is being addressed in different forums.

At the end of the day, Canadians will once again be presented with a budget that is progressive and positive for Canada's middle class and those aspiring to be a part of it. The budget will provide opportunities for Canadians from coast to coast to coast and give them hope.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the government wanting to move to Bill C-92. It has made commitments for years that it finally tabled in a flawed bill. That bill could be improved and do the job it is supposed to do if the government is willing to accept amendments to it.

As we know, the government has all of these tools in the tool box, which is the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. The member protested that he wanted to move to debate on Bill C-92, but during the entire half-hour speech, he did not move to adjourn the debate and go to orders of the day. He has in his possession a whole range of tools that he chose not to use.

My question is very simple. If the Liberals really believe in going to Bill C-92, which Canadians have been waiting years for, why did he not use any of the tools he has? Is that incompetence, or is it because the government actually does not want to go to Bill C-92?

• (1100)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question, even though the Champlain Bridge was not incorporated in it.

Having said that, I am glad there is support and encouragement for the government to use the tools within the Standing Orders so we can get this important legislative agenda, in particular Bill C-92, through the House. That means at times we will have to move to

Government Orders and use time allocation to do that, because as has been demonstrated yesterday and today, the Conservatives, and we will have to wait to see about the NDP, continue to filibuster.

As a result, the member is right; there are tools within the Standing Orders, and I hope that when the time comes for us to use those tools, the NDP House leader will be behind us in making sure they are effective in enabling us to pass the legislation, because it is obvious the Conservatives do not want us to pass anything. They have demonstrated that through obstruction, both here and in our standing committees.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was born in Montreal and my family lives there, so I am very familiar with the Champlain Bridge.

[*English*]

I understand how important that bridge is to the city. People in the city care deeply about this project, but I am not sure this debate advances anything in respect of that project. I also know that people in Montreal and people in Toronto, the area I represent, care deeply about the indigenous child welfare legislation that we were supposed to debate today.

What does my colleague think is the most effective use of our time, not only for the bridge but in moving forward on the important issue of indigenous child welfare legislation?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. We should have started the debate on Bill C-92 yesterday.

Bill C-92 affects thousands of children throughout our country; in fact, it affects hundreds of them in Winnipeg North alone. In Winnipeg North, there are hundreds of children in foster care. In Manitoba, well over 10,000 children are in foster care and many of them are indigenous. Our indigenous communities talk about reconciliation, and this is a big part of it.

However, the Conservatives are filibustering, and today we are now talking about the Champlain Bridge. Members in the Liberal caucus, like my colleague, very much want to see that bridge. We are the ones who are pushing for that bridge to be completed. We recognize the importance of the bridge to residents of Montreal, and that is why we are pushing it.

If the Conservatives want to have a debate on the bridge, then they should go to the public accounts committee, which will have future discussions about it. Is it really necessary here in the chamber, especially given that we are supposed to be debating Bill C-92? No, it is a filibuster by the Conservatives, and shame on them because they do not understand what the priorities of Canadians really and truly are. They should get back on track with Canadians and get rid of the former Harper government-style, gutter-type politics.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is finally becoming clear what the government is trying to do. It was absolutely so incompetent with the indigenous language legislation that it had to table drop 30 amendments. The Liberals know that there are some real challenges with Bill C-92. They were after their friends to say it is the Conservatives who are stalling, when we know they have tools they could use today to enable us to get on with that debate.

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Please keep your blame for those who deserve it, which is right on yourself. You could have moved on. Thank you very much, but please tell us why you did not do that.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I would remind hon. members that I try to be as neutral as possible, but I believe the member's intervention was to the parliamentary secretary. Therefore, I encourage members, when they ask their questions, to use the third person so that the question will be asked of the parliamentary secretary.

• (1105)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, do I have news for the member opposite. The Liberal Party, or the Government of Canada, did not make the Conservatives move that motion today. We did not make them move that motion yesterday. However, now the member is saying we should have forced it, used time allocation or gone to Government Orders.

Those are good ideas, and I will be recommending those types of ideas to the government House leader, because what we see day in and day out more and more is a Conservative opposition that is completely dysfunctional in terms of dealing with the issues that are important to Canadians. They want to fixate on attacking personalities as opposed to looking after Canadians' interests. To that I say shame on the Conservative Party.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to speak about the Champlain Bridge. This is a very important project for the people of Montreal, Quebec and Canada.

This infrastructure project began in 2007 when *Le Journal de Montréal* published an article about the need to build a 10-lane bridge across the river. A month later, Novaroute, a private firm, decided to conduct a study in order to publish a story about building a tunnel under the river. At that point, everyone had already known for more than 10 years that the bridge would have to be replaced, but the plan was several years in the making.

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts issued a report in response to the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General found that the Conservatives completely botched the job of ensuring that the bridge would be built in a timely manner and in the best interests of Canadians.

This report shows that the Conservatives mismanaged public funds. The Auditor General's report is astonishing. The report included a number of recommendations directed at the Harper Conservatives, who could have considerably improved their approach.

It is mind-boggling that the Conservatives are bringing these reports back to our attention to discuss them, but I will talk about them.

The reports indicate that, according to the Auditor General, the Conservatives did not even properly plan the bridge's construction. It is absolutely unbelievable that they did not even produce an adequate plan for getting the job done.

On October 6, 2011, the day after the announcement about replacing the bridge, an article reported that it would be a new bridge, not a tunnel, built through a P3, costing a maximum of \$5 billion and that it would be ready within 10 years. Both the Office of the Auditor General and a government news release indicate that the decision to use a P3 model was made in 2011, a fact that is also supported by a news article. Deputy Minister Kelly Gillis said that the decision was made in December 2013, because that was when the government announced the accelerated timeline to replace the bridge in 2018, and the analyses carried out in 2012 and 2013 addressed the best way to complete the project quickly.

According to the Office of the Auditor General, the value-for-money analyses were of little use to decision-makers and contained many flaws favouring the P3 model. What is more, the department's analyses indicated savings that were unrealistic.

It was unrealistic. The Conservatives say that they are extremely good at managing the economy and public funds, but according to the OAG, the department's analyses were unrealistic. It took a Liberal government to get this bridge built and to make sure the work was done properly.

I would also note that the Conservatives wanted a toll on this bridge that would have cost every person who crosses the bridge five days a week \$2,340 a year. It is unbelievable. That is \$2,340 that would have been taken or practically stolen out of taxpayers' pockets. It is terrible when we think about it. Montrealers are lucky we are here now to manage the resources. The bridge is almost finished, and there is no toll. It is a bridge for public use. It is a bridge that everyone will be able to use. The Conservatives wanted this bridge to be used only by their wealthy friends.

• (1110)

The following is another recommendation from the Office of the Auditor General:

After completing the construction of the new Champlain Bridge, Infrastructure Canada should create realistic benchmarks for construction costs, risk evaluation, and efficiency rates in value-for-money analyses, for use in future requests for proposals for infrastructure projects.

This seems to make perfect sense, but former Conservative infrastructure ministers Lawrence Cannon and Denis Lebel did not understand it. They did not know what they were doing. I want to share another quote from the report:

Without obtaining results of durability analyses in advance, Infrastructure Canada could not know whether the proposed bridge designs would meet the expected service life requirement before it signed a contract with the selected bidder. [For instance]...they did not fully assess several deterioration mechanisms—for example, frost damage and the compounding effect of all deterioration mechanisms. As a result, [the OAG] performed comprehensive durability analyses on the designs of key non-replaceable components of the new bridge. In [its] analysis, [it] did not find design problems that would affect the examined components' ability to meet their expected service life.

I would like to come back to the passage stating that Infrastructure Canada could not know whether the proposed bridge designs met the expected service life requirements. The Conservatives were so inept and incapable of managing public assets that they were not even able to figure out if this bridge would last. The bridge would be built and then perhaps one day collapse. A bridge should last at least 100 years and ideally 125 years.

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According to the Auditor General, the Conservatives did not know if it would last because they did not even evaluate this requirement. Ten years ago, several people died in Montreal because of how certain structures were built. It is disgraceful that the Conservatives did not even take the time to evaluate this properly. We are now here to debate this issue. It is disgraceful that the Conservatives continue to put forward the proposals of Stephen Harper, Denis Lebel and Lawrence Cannon. We are pleased that they are no longer in power. We have come out of this decade of decay and poor management of our economy and public assets. They should be ashamed.

Now, I would like to remind members that we are supposed to be debating Bill C-92.

• (1115)

[English]

We are supposed to be debating Bill C-92, which is about the children, youth and families of first nations, Inuit and Métis. We are not debating that right now because instead we are doing what the Conservatives want, which is to debate this infrastructure report. This is an infrastructure report that demonstrates the poor management of the Conservative Party when it was in power, regarding the public good in Montreal with respect to the Champlain Bridge. Therefore, we are not debating this very important bill concerning child welfare for our children.

When I gave my maiden speech in the House of Commons three years ago, I spoke about child welfare. The speech was about the 11,000 kids in care in the province of Manitoba.

Since that time, I have had the opportunity in my riding, one of the poorest ridings in the country, to speak with mothers and fathers who have had their children taken, such as Chantelle Hutchison, who drove all the way from Brandon, Manitoba, to see me in Winnipeg to advocate to, somehow, get her child back, her little girl. I keep this photo of the little girl above my stove so that when I am cooking in my apartment here in Ottawa I remember why I was elected. Even though we were not able to help the mother get her child back, I hope if Chantelle is listening right now she knows that this legislation we have here today is because of her hard work advocating not only on behalf of her child but for the thousands of children and families in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and right across the country.

This legislation is so important that I call on the Conservatives to not play games anymore and to stop debate on this report, which I am sure is very important, but this child welfare bill is so important it needs to move forward. It needs to move on through this House and to the Senate. If we spend a lot of time playing these games, this legislation will not become law and we will not effect change. We will continue doing the same things we did with the Indian residential schools.

I will admit that I was mean to the Conservatives. However, I will throw them what I hope is a rose. I was proud when Stephen Harper stood in the House and gave the apology for the Indian residential schools, because it was a defining moment in the history of our nation. We were able to come together in a good way. We had indigenous leaders here. We had all-party support. The apology was made and then we built a stained glass window just outside the old chamber to commemorate it, so that every time we as parliamentar-

ians go through our door, in and out of that chamber, we remember the Indian residential schools. I think this law is like that.

Indian residential schools were about placing children in large institutions. However, back in the sixties we slowly changed how the system worked. We started to place children up for adoption. We call that the sixties scoop, the stolen generation. Then, in the eighties, we stopped using adoption and started placing them with foster families in child welfare. We continue to do that today. It is extremely sad that it continues. We are perpetuating the same mistakes of the past but in a different way. It is more diffused. Instead of concentrating children in one place, we are spreading them around society.

Therefore, I hope we can stop debate on this lovely report. I am sure the committee members worked very hard on it. I can continue hammering away on the Conservatives if they would like. I can do it all in French, with all the costs. However, what I really want to get to is this. I think the legislation, Bill C-92, should go to committee. If we can get it passed at second reading and to committee, we can have the debate, we can hear what indigenous organizations and indigenous peoples want, deal with the legislative amendments from some provincial governments and come to a conclusion.

It was mentioned in the debate about the indigenous languages legislation from last night, which is very important, how over 30 amendments were table dropped. That does not mean the government was just willing to table legislation and not see any changes at all. It means it was willing to consult and listen to people. I think it is important that things are not written in stone when it comes out of the justice department so that improvements can be made through public discussion. That is what needs to happen with this law. It is great to debate and get people on the record here in this chamber, but what we really need is to have this legislation move on to committee, because that is where we will see that change.

• (1120)

I am going to leave the House with a statistic. We know there are 11,000 kids in care. We know that every day in Manitoba a newborn baby is seized, a newborn baby is taken from the mother, sometimes for good reason and sometimes not. In Manitoba, if someone was in the child welfare system and they give birth, there will be a note on their health file and if they give birth in the Manitoba health care system, their child will automatically be taken.

I see men and women come into my office, week after week, trying to get a letter of recommendation, not for immigration purposes, not for a visitor visa, but to say that they are a good parent. I look at the certificates and all the training they have gone through to become good parents and to prove they are good parents. It is strange that they have to get certificates to prove they are good parents. Not everyone else has to do that. I never had to do that. I am sure most of the members here never had to prove that they were a good parent.

However, that is what happens day in and day out in this country for some of the poorest citizens who cannot afford lawyers, who cannot afford to really advocate on their own behalf, who are sometimes only 18 or 19 years old, who got pregnant and who want to love their child.

I know there are people who will say online or will write me to say that there are terrible people who need to have their children taken. The Province of Manitoba, through the Health Sciences Centre research branch published a report looking at child welfare, and 87% of all children taken are taken not because of issues related to abuse but are taken because of issues related to poverty. That leaves 13%. Incredibly enough, that 13% is where we have allegations of abuse. Of that 13%, only 12% are substantiated abuse. This means that in the vast majority of cases, there is no abuse involved. It is just because people are too poor to look after their own children, or for other issues.

That is a travesty of justice in our age. That is why it is important that we have some consensus to stop debating report 51 and move on to Bill C-92, a historic piece of legislation that will affect great change across our nation, which is needed now, before this Parliament ends, while we have the opportunity and the chance.

Do not let this occasion slip through our fingers. Whether members win in this upcoming election or not, every parliamentarian who participates in this debate on Bill C-92, who lets this legislation move forward, will be able to look at themselves in the mirror. When they are at home and wondering why they lost or won that election, they will be able to look themselves in the eye at two o'clock in the morning and know that they made a difference.

• (1125)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is becoming more clear as this debate progresses is the attempt by the Liberals to distract.

What they are trying to distract from is their appalling position in terms of SNC-Lavalin, and the fact that they easily could have been debating Bill C-92 now in the chamber had they just exercised some of the tools they have at their disposal. They are trying to shift the blame. The reason the Liberals are trying to shift the blame is perhaps that the bill is as challenged as the indigenous languages bill, where they had to table drop 30 amendments, and it is unheard of for a government to have to table drop 30 amendments.

We absolutely think we should be looking at the child welfare legislation, but I hope it is not as dismally flawed as other legislation the Liberals have presented in the House.

How can the hon. member sit there and say that we need to talk about Bill C-92, when as a member of the government he is not exercising the opportunities that he has to make it happen?

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I know members love to play games. I know there are all sorts of manoeuvres that can be made using the Standing Orders. Just yesterday, two motions were proposed by the Conservatives that delayed debate on Bill C-92.

We talk about relevance here, so I am going to talk about it. I do not believe the report has any mention of SNC-Lavalin, yet the

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member opposite raises this issue. What does that have to do with our debate?

I would like to point something out. Some believe that the justice department and its lawyers write legislation in stone and that it is so good that when it comes out of the justice department, no changes need to be made by parliamentarians. That is wrong. Parliament should have a role to play in making changes and debating those changes when they go to committee. Our role as a Parliament is to assert our power as parliamentarians to make changes in legislation.

Let us talk about the legislation on indigenous languages. Over 30 changes were made because people were willing to listen and make those changes, and that is great. Members should listen.

If this legislation, Bill C-92, requires more changes, we are willing to listen. I know some groups want to see some little differences and they want to see a little more power being given to indigenous groups. I know the Province of Manitoba has some concerns. However, these changes happen in committee and are made by the people who study this day in and day out and who are experts in this subject matter area. They have the best understanding, as they have been studying these issues for a number of years.

I trust the member opposite has a great expertise in this area and can bring great ideas to make those changes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I look forward to talking about the bill on the welfare of indigenous children. It would have been nice if this had come up for debate before the government's fourth year in office.

Today I want to talk about the construction of the new Champlain Bridge. I represent a riding in Montreal, and I have to say that we are very proud of the bridge and find it quite beautiful. For ideological reasons, the federal government chose to build it under a public-private partnership, a P3. The government believed its magic formula would provide protection against cost overruns and missed deadlines. Obviously it did not work that way, and the bridge was delayed. In October, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities said that, if there were delays, there would be consequences. The private consortium is supposed to pay penalties ranging from \$100,000 to \$400,000 per day for construction delays.

What I want to know today is whether penalties have been paid. If so, as of what date were they paid? Did the consortium pay the full amount set out in the contract?

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for that great question.

Regarding consultations, I will say this. In 2014, the Conservatives decided to name the bridge after Maurice Richard. He was a great Canadian, a great hockey player, but they did not even take the time to consult his family. They forgot. The family asked that the idea be dropped.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: That was not my question.

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Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, I hear the member yelling at me across the House. I am going to answer his question. On the subject of the P3 and its costs, when we took office, we were forced to continue with it, because Montreal's infrastructure, its bridges, were deteriorating at an alarming rate. We made a commitment not to charge a toll. That is a done deal. There is no toll. This is a public asset for everyone.

If we had decided to stop the work and start over from scratch, the bridge would never have been built, and we would still be stuck with the old Champlain Bridge. It is important to finish building infrastructure, especially infrastructure that is so important to the economy of Montreal, one of our biggest cities. If a bridge collapses or is closed for whatever reason, the impact on our economy could be dire. This bridge is used by many trucks carrying goods and merchandise and many people coming into the Montreal area. Losing it would be devastating to our economy. That is why it is so important that this bridge be built. It will be completed in 2019. The end is in sight.

I hope that the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities will invite me to cut the ribbon at the inauguration ceremony someday. I think I gave a pretty good speech on this report.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I think it would be helpful for anyone watching this from home to understand the kinds of machinations that go on in this place. I agree with the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre that it would be much better if we were debating Bill C-92, the indigenous child welfare legislation. At this point, it is inadequate and needs to get to committee.

Cindy Blackstock said, “the red flags are already flying, such as the pan-Indigenous approach, the lack of a clear funding base, a lack of attention to the child welfare needs among and between first nations, Métis and Inuit.”

However, we find ourselves here because of the refusal of the Liberals on the justice committee to allow the former attorney general to speak. That puts the opposition, in this case the official opposition, the Conservatives, in a mood that says they will do anything to monkey wrench what is going on in this place.

Although I do not like monkey wrenching in general, I have to admit there is nothing that makes sense about saying that those involved in the SNC-Lavalin question of inappropriate pressure brought on our former attorney general are allowed to speak twice if they happen to represent the view of “nothing go on here, move on”. We are denied the opportunity to put critical questions to the former attorney general.

In the context of a debate that should be on something else, the Conservatives have taken the chance they have through procedural machinations and monkey wrenching. In this case, my sympathies are with the official opposition because we should not have been denied that opportunity to hear from the former attorney general, as much as I agree with the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre that we should be discussing Bill C-92.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Mr. Speaker, when I was on the finance committee, when I first came to Parliament, people said that I would get my orders from the PMO or someone else. At no time did I ever have anyone tell me what to do.

In fact, I remember a number of occasions when I was on the finance committee and I asked harder questions than the opposition. There was a couple of times when journalists said that it seemed the member from Winnipeg Centre asked some questions that were even tougher than what the member for Milton asked or the member who was the former leader in the House for the second opposition from Rimouski.

I also remember having some discussions with my colleagues who sometimes did not like my questions. However, I was not there to please my colleagues. I was there to get to the truth.

Every member here is independent. At least, I assume we are. I heard that under previous governments, perhaps under the Stephen Harper government, that things were a bit more “by the book”, that members were told what to do. They took their orders. The government at that time would take people out of a committee and replace them with “ringers”, as they called them. Know what? I have never been replaced.

An hon. member: They still do that.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: They still do that? I did not know that.

My great thing is that in my time in the House, I know I exercise my rights as a parliamentarian. I will make decisions in the best interests of my citizens. I expect that from all parliamentarians here.

If members would like to take it up with individual members, they should. However, it is not up to the government to decide that for members of Parliament. That is not how it should work. We, as members of Parliament, have full rights to exercise our independence and our own decision-making.

• (1135)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise today in the House and join this concurrence debate.

I know this issue was discussed yesterday, but since this is my first time rising since it happened, I do want to add my voice to those of many others who have expressed condolences for the victims of the terrible terrorist attack targeting the Muslim community in New Zealand, and express my solidarity with the victims and all those who are in some way affected by this event.

I also want to highlight growing concerns about the persecution and violence targeting Christians in Nigeria. This is something I have been hearing about from constituents and I know it is a concern for many members in the House as well.

I want to set the stage with respect to the context of the debate. There is some discussion back and forth about the procedure that brings us here.

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The opposition has moved a concurrence motion with respect to a report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. It is interesting to hear members of the government speak as if we just should not use the opportunity to bring forward concurrence motions that reflect important public policy issues, but instead we should only debate the things that the government puts on the agenda. This reflects a certain misunderstanding about the role of the opposition and what we are here to do. It is perfectly legitimate for the opposition to put forward motions with respect to committee reports and other issues that reflect public policy issues and reflect what we hear from our constituents. There is nothing illegitimate about the opposition doing its job in that way.

Members of the government would like to talk about aspects of their own legislative agenda, but they need to understand that this is not just about a government and an audience. This is about a government and an opposition. This is how the House of Commons is supposed to work.

We know the government would like to, and on multiple occasions has attempted to, reduce the powers and prerogatives of the opposition to indeed reduce us to a mere audience. However, this Conservative opposition has not and will not go quietly in that respect. It is important for us to assert the prerogatives of members, to assert the important role of the opposition and to use the tools that are available to us, yes, to raise, through concurrence and other measures, important public policy issues, but also to use these tools as a way of challenging the government to do better in other areas.

For instance, we have said that the former attorney general should be able to testify before the justice committee with all of the fetters off. She should be able to actually talk about why she resigned from cabinet and events that happened afterwards. Up until now, the Prime Minister and the government have not allowed that to happen. We have, in a number of ways through parliamentary procedures, highlighted the unwillingness of the government to allow that conversation to take place. Now we have members of the justice committee who are trying to shut down hearings into what happened involving the Prime Minister, the former attorney general and SNC-Lavalin. Therefore, we are very concerned about that.

We hear concerns from Canadians. They are looking for answers and want us as the opposition to use the tools that are available to us to seek answers, and certainly we are going to continue to do that. Therefore, we make no apologies for being an efficient and effective opposition; for standing up for what Canadians are saying; for raising issues around infrastructure, around the Champlain Bridge; and also for raising issues around corruption, dealing with the government. These are things we are going to continue to highlight, whether members of the government like it or not.

Parenthetically I will say that in some of the speeches and comments we have heard from members of the government, they have talked about Bill C-92, which is the legislation that apparently the Liberals were intending to bring forward today. I will draw to the attention of members the fact that Bill C-92 was tabled in the House the last Thursday before the break. Therefore, in terms of sitting days, it has been tabled here for about three days.

Canadians know that the government has been in place for approaching three and a half years. Certainly, these issues around

child welfare and indigenous child welfare are important issues for discussion. The government could have moved forward with the discussion of this issue a long time ago. The Liberals could have put forward reforms that they thought appropriate much earlier in their mandate and we would have already discussed these changes and have moved forward with them. However, the government is waiting until the last possible minute to put these things forward and tabling it. Then right away the Liberals are saying that anyone who puts forward other motions and other issues for debate in the House is somehow obstructing this.

● (1140)

The Liberals have been way behind the eight ball in putting forward proposals in this area, and now it is someone else's fault. Their failure to take action, their failure to move the discussion forward earlier, is not something that should lead to the opposition losing its opportunity to raise other issues as well. Their lack of management of the House calendar and their own legislative agenda does not somehow create a requirement for the opposition, especially when all the Liberals would have had to do to facilitate greater co-operation in the House on matters of agenda and procedure was allow the former attorney general to speak at committee without the kind of restrictions the government is continuing to put on the former attorney general.

Canadians want and deserve to hear what she wants to say, and she wants to speak about those things as well. If the government would like to move forward, the first step is to listen to Canadians and let the former attorney general address all the issues around this sordid affair and then allow Canadians to make their own judgment.

I would like to address, in particular, the issues raised in the concurrence motion. This is report 4 of the Auditor General, which deals with the proposal to replace the Champlain Bridge in Montreal and the issue of extensions and late fees being paid by the government. It is another case of Canadians paying in the form of late fees for the mistakes of the government.

We see so many areas in which Canadians are paying more as a result of the mistakes of the government. We are seeing, as a result of that, attempts by the government to raise people's taxes. We know that those attempts to raise taxes are not the end of it from the government. Indeed, this out-of-control spending is the same thing we saw from the Kathleen Wynne Liberals in Ontario. When there is out-of-control spending, it leads to subsequent proposals from the same government for higher taxes.

We have a critical window of time to fix those failures, to get back on track in terms of spending, to address the deficit, to control the areas of failure that are costing Canadians and to thus prevent this kind of situation where taxes will have to go up.

Moving forward on the Champlain Bridge is an important project. It is a process that began with the previous Conservative government, but we have seen a failure to move this forward effectively by the current Liberal government. This is representative of a larger problem in terms of the infrastructure policies of the government. The government has failed to deliver on infrastructure in many different areas. The Liberals talk a lot about infrastructure. They have made a lot of promises about infrastructure, but they have failed to deliver.

Routine Proceedings

Let us start from the beginning on the infrastructure file. The first minister of infrastructure, who is from a neighbouring riding in the Edmonton region, was very concerned about the infrastructure of his office. He was very concerned about developing the infrastructure where he and his political staff would be operating. Huge amounts of money were spent on renovations in his office, and this was widely discussed within his constituency and the surrounding area. I heard those discussions. When the priorities of the infrastructure minister should have been infrastructure Canadians use, such as roads, bridges and so on, so much in the way of public dollars went into renovating the infrastructure of his office instead.

We see repeatedly from the government announcements and reannouncements of the same projects, projects, in many cases, that were previously put in place, and a lot of the work done, under the previous government, yet we see a lack of action.

• (1145)

Earlier this year, the Prime Minister and eight of his ministers fanned out across the country to reannounce infrastructure announcements that had already been made, which provided more opportunities for photos and selfies. However, the Liberals, when it comes to infrastructure, as in so many other areas, are all talk and no action. They are not moving forward. We see that on all sorts of key infrastructure, including the Champlain Bridge.

I would add that while there is a failure to move forward on Canadian infrastructure, the government made a decision to make a big investment in something called the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the AIIB. The AIIB is headquartered in Beijing and really is a tool of China's foreign policy to build infrastructure throughout Asia. We have seen the way the Chinese government seeks to build infrastructure as a way of extending its political influence and control throughout the continent. There is the example of a port constructed in Sri Lanka. It has raised big concerns about Chinese control and influence as a result of the way this port project has proceeded.

There are many different cases through the so-called belt and road initiative, whereby the Chinese government seeks to extend its influence by spending money on these kinds of projects. One might understand why the Chinese government sees it as in its national interest to do so. However, what I do not understand and what constituents in my riding do not understand is why it is in Canada's interest to be spending Canadian taxpayer dollars on building infrastructure in Asia through a vehicle that is designed to advance the foreign policy objectives of the Government of the People's Republic of China. That does not make sense to me and my constituents, and I do not think it makes to taxpayers anywhere.

While putting hundreds of millions of dollars into the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which is building a pipeline in Azerbaijan and projects outside the country, we have had a failure to move forward with vital infrastructure projects here in Canada.

I have raised the issue of the dissonance between the eagerness to invest in infrastructure overseas and the failure to invest in infrastructure here in Canada. The government's response is that this is about Canadian companies now having the opportunity to bid on these projects. The Liberals say that if they give money to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, this vehicle of China's

Communist government's foreign policy, Canadian companies will be able to participate in these projects. That would be an interesting argument, if it were true.

When I was in Beijing last, I visited the headquarters of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to discuss its procurement policies. It said very clearly that it has an open staffing and open procurement policy. Therefore, any company from anywhere in the world, theoretically, has the same opportunity to bid on their projects, regardless of whether the country in which that company is headquartered is a member of the bank. That was the Liberal government's one argument for putting hundreds of millions of dollars into this foreign infrastructure bank: it would provide opportunities for Canadian companies to bid. However, Canadian companies already have those opportunities.

Canadian nationals already have the opportunity to work for the bank. In fact, when we went to Beijing, we met with a Canadian national who was working for the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Therefore, the Liberals' only argument for hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money going to these projects falls through. It would not have been difficult to find that information.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: How much money did Harper put in the Asian bank?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: My colleague is heckling with a question he can ask during questions and comments. I think it was about how much other countries are putting into this bank.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: No, how much did Harper put in?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: He is asking about the previous government. The previous government of Canada did not participate in the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. It chose not to. That decision was aligned with the decision, for instance, of the Barack Obama administration in the United States, which raised significant concerns about accountability and issues around human rights related to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. However, the Liberal government, in its eagerness to curry favour with the Chinese regime, put hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars into that bank.

The issue I hear from Canadians is that they are supportive of a focused, objective-driven, compassionate international development policy, but they do not see why we should give money to an organization affiliated with the Chinese government that is building infrastructure as a way of advancing its foreign policy, when we have dramatic unmet infrastructure issues here at home that the government is simply ignoring.

• (1150)

One other aspect of infrastructure, although it has historically generally been infrastructure built by the private sector, is the issue of pipelines. We see a total failure of the government to move forward with pipelines. The former infrastructure minister, now the natural resources minister, has been no more successful moving forward natural resources infrastructure than he was in his previous portfolio directly dealing with the issue of infrastructure.

Routine Proceedings

We see many areas of failure with the Liberal government when it comes to infrastructure, pipelines and prioritizing the needs, interests and values of Canadians. As a result of those failures, Canadians are paying for the government's mistakes.

If members are wondering why the government's focus seems to be off here and why it seems to have missed basic points about things like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, it may be because it is distracted. It may be because its focus has so narrowly been on its own strategic interests and on covering for the damage to its political reputation that is coming about as a result of the SNC-Lavalin affair.

The government's effort to manage this message without actually coming clean on the reality is really unbelievable. The latest announcement on the government's approach to responding to SNC-Lavalin was that it is going to appoint a former Liberal cabinet minister, who is still actively involved in fundraising for the Liberal Party of Canada, to provide some kind of independent advice. That is quite something. That would be like asking Stephen Harper to provide non-partisan advice. Clearly, when one brings in a former politician who has long been affiliated with and continues to support a political party and claims that this person is going to provide independent advice, that is a transparent attempt at misdirection.

There would be a simple solution to the government's efforts to manage the message, and that would be to actually come clean, open up the doors, recognize that sunlight is the best disinfectant and allow all the conversations that need to happen to happen. What would that look like? It would mean allowing the former attorney general to come to committee to speak without the restrictions of solicitor-client privilege or cabinet confidence. The government tried to play this sleight-of-hand game on this issue by saying that it was going to waive these restrictions, but only up to a certain point and not after a certain point.

The Conservative deputy leader, the member from Milton, was very clear in asking questions at committee and received very clear answers from the former attorney general. Was she able to speak about why she resigned from cabinet? No. Was she able to speak about conversations that happened after? No. Was she able to speak about the possible continuation of pressure or clarify the nature of the pressure, discussions and information that came to her afterwards? No, she was not.

We know now that another member of the cabinet has resigned. The Prime Minister's principal secretary has resigned, and the Clerk of the Privy Council is leaving. We have four major resignations associated with this affair, but nothing is wrong, according to the front bench. It is incredible that the Liberals would try to sustain this narrative that nothing is wrong while we have this continuing spate of resignations. That does not include the large and growing number of members of the Liberal caucus who are saying that they are not running again. We cannot, of course, know the exact cause in every case, but there has been a significant spike in announcements of not running again ever since this affair broke.

This affair stinks. We need answers. Let the former attorney general speak.

We are seeing many cases of failure by the government to proceed on infrastructure issues, failures that are costing Canadians more. These are important issues to highlight and discuss in this House.

● (1155)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whether it is today or yesterday, the sad reality is that the Conservatives, as the official opposition, are filibustering and preventing Bill C-92 from being debated. Bill C-92 affects the lives of children. In Manitoba alone, there are over 11,000 kids in foster care, most of whom are of indigenous heritage. When one talks of reconciliation, Bill C-92 is a big part that reconciliation and provides hope in many different ways.

For the second day, the opposition has brought in another concurrence motion. There are over 500 motions and only another 49 sitting days. If it was up to the Conservatives, they would bring forward a motion every day. Their intent is to be destructive to the government and its agenda. It is as simple as that. Today Conservatives are even saying that we have other tools we should have used to force them to behave responsibly. Unfortunately, we will have to look at those because of the opposition.

Stephen Harper and the former government were going to put a toll on the Champlain Bridge. This government removed that toll, and the building of the bridge is going forward. Could the member explain why he felt the Harper government was correct in instituting a toll on that particular bridge?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I only spoke for 20 minutes, which is not a filibuster, at least not by my standards. I think the member knows that. We are discussing an important issue of public concern, which is infrastructure. I know the government is embarrassed to have discussions about its approach to infrastructure because it is failing so badly to deliver on the commitments it made.

With respect to Bill C-92, the member for Winnipeg North feels the urgency of the issue. It is an urgent issue to discuss, yet the government, in spite of this talk today about the urgency of the issue, failed to bring forward legislative proposals for three and a half years. The bill has been tabled before the House for a total of four sitting days, including today. The government's lack of action on this does not obviate the need for significant discussion around the bill. Some of that discussion needs to take place internally before the bill is debated. Members need a bit of an opportunity to review the bill, of course, as well as for the debate to come before the House. That is part of the appropriate process of due scrutiny.

If the member for Winnipeg North wanted to see the bill pass earlier, his government should have proposed the bill at an earlier stage. As well, on the issues he is talking about relating to reconciliation, the government had somebody in cabinet with an indigenous background and significant experience within indigenous politics and who I think would have been a voice around the cabinet table and reflected that experience. The sniping we have seen toward that former minister is indicative of where the government is actually sitting when it comes to the issue of reconciliation.

Routine Proceedings

On the issue of the toll, when the government makes spending commitments way outside the framework of a balanced budget, unfortunately Canadians cannot have confidence that it will follow through. It has made so many promises that it has not followed through on. This government has out-of-control deficits and promises that there will not be a toll, yet it is nowhere near meeting its spending commitments. The government promised a balanced budget in this budget being presented today. We will see if there is a balanced budget later today. I somehow doubt it. Canadians have a lack of confidence in the government's commitments because it just does not have the discipline when it comes to spending to follow through.

● (1200)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

I have noticed that his speeches are generally very detailed and well-researched. However, it is still important to point out that, generally speaking, the Conservative Party is known for its rather aggressive and somewhat crass approach. We cannot help but notice that the current approach taken by the Conservative Party is putting the Liberal Party in a very difficult position. Generally speaking, the Liberals signal left during elections and then turn right once they take office. We currently have a government that has done nothing about the things that it said were important priorities.

The member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, my neighbour's colleague, talked about the indigenous languages act yesterday. A total of 23 new amendments to the bill were flippantly proposed during the clause-by-clause study. That is reckless. It is obvious the file is being mismanaged when we look at the differences between the bill and what was said, namely that indigenous languages are so important to the Liberals and that this is such an important issue for them. Bill C-92 is a perfect example of this.

I would like my colleague to explain why the Liberal government does not take control instead of blaming the Conservatives. The government has everything it needs to do that, so that we can talk about Bill C-92.

Our parliamentary secretary said that there are only 49 sitting days left. It is shameful that the government waited so long to study such an important bill.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, my colleague had a variety of comments, some of which I agree with and some I do not. He suggested that the current Liberal government is a little too far to the right. I do not know if I agree with him on that, but I will say that the government does disappoint a lot of people in the approach it takes, because during election campaigns, the Liberals promise to be all things to all people, and then when they get into government, they say that they did not necessarily take a careful enough look at the books beforehand when they made those promises. That is why I think people across the spectrum with different kinds of priorities are in general disappointed by the failures of the government, the failures in terms of management, in terms of delivering on vital areas

of social need as well as to efficiently and effectively manage Canada's spending.

In terms of a failure to follow through on promises, let us remember that today, budget day, was the day that the government promised, in the last campaign, the budget would be balanced. The Liberals promised three years of moderate deficits followed by a balanced budget in the fourth year. They absolutely blew out of the water their deficit projections in the previous three years and now, today, it seems fairly unlikely that we are going to be seeing a balanced budget from the finance minister. He will do everything he can in the budget to try to distract attention from the ongoing corruption scandal involving the removal from her position of the former attorney general. However, let us remember in this context as well that a balanced budget was promised by the government. It is what the Liberals promised and they are completely ignoring their promises. I think it is quite clear that Canadians cannot have confidence in any commitment they make now or in the future.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the member wants to talk about the budget. In fact, we wish that is what we could be talking about. Whether it is Bill C-92 or the budget, it is good stuff.

We can take a look at the Conservatives versus the Liberals on budget-related issues. We have made solid commitments to the Canada child benefit, lifting thousands of children out of poverty, and the guaranteed income supplement, lifting thousands of seniors out of poverty. We have invested in health care, in infrastructure, and we have invested and worked with provinces to develop a plan on CPP and on the price on pollution. These are all wonderful, progressive things.

I, like the member opposite, look forward to the budget, because I think we will see a continuation of the strengthening of Canada's middle class, those aspiring to be a part of it and those who are in need. These are really important issues for Canadians. I think we would both agree on that. There are issues such as the 900,000 jobs. Imagine all the taxes collected by those 900,000 new jobs.

Would the member not agree that the budget does matter?

● (1205)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, the member asked if I think the budget is important. Yes, what the government does or does not include in the budget is of great importance. We look forward to debating that budget.

We look forward to challenging the member on some of the misstatements he made, for instance, on his claim about the carbon tax. Canadians are overwhelmingly concerned about the government's approach on the carbon tax. The member spoke about having renamed the universal child care benefit, now calling it the Canada child benefit. Certainly, the government has a hard time pointing to many concrete accomplishments. It can point, in some cases, to the renaming of programs. That is something it has been able to do.

Routine Proceedings

Other than the renaming of certain good initiatives from the previous government, we do not see a lot of positive action from the government. At the end of the day, in terms of commitments, in terms of moving forward, there needs to be a balanced budget or at least a plan to get to balanced budgets in order for Canadians to have any confidence in the spending commitments the government is making. Canadians cannot have confidence—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities.

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on the opposition motion to concur in the report submitted by the Auditor General with respect to the Champlain Bridge, which is an important infrastructure project that dates back some years.

I wish I could say that I am pleased to do so. However, the timing of this Conservative motion is interesting and curious, given the government's business of the day, which includes important historic legislation with respect to indigenous youth and children as well as the Minister of Finance's budget for this fiscal year, 2019, which Canadians depend on us to put forward so that we can continue to deliver results.

There has been a lot of commentary recently about how we do politics in this country and in the House. I think Canadians will judge the opposition, which says today that it is holding the government to account. I question Conservatives on that assertion, because it is really just the opposition doing more of the same.

This attempt to disguise as legitimate the debate about concurrence in a report—a report that was itself the subject of debate before the transportation committee some time ago—is actually just a naked and transparent effort to obstruct and disrupt the business of Canadians, the business of the government. Our government has been singularly focused on providing results with respect to the economy, trade, the environment, reconciliation, and criminal justice reform, all areas in which I believe we have made significant progress over the course of the last three and a half years. Along with my colleagues on this side of the aisle, I look forward with great enthusiasm to taking that record to the Canadian people this fall in the hope of earning the privilege to continue to govern on their behalf.

With respect to the concurrence report that the Conservatives have put back on the table, I begin by noting that it was a scathing indictment of the last Conservative government's handling and bungling of the award and procurement process to allow private developers to take the Champlain Bridge into the 21st century and beyond. There was a lethargy, a slowness, a lack of transparency in the way the Conservative government handled the procurement that cost the taxpayer hundreds of millions of dollars. The Conservatives' mishandling of this infrastructure project continues to cost Canadians.

Liberals have put it back on track under the leadership of successive ministers of infrastructure. I have the honour of serving with our current Minister of Infrastructure, who is from Quebec. He feels very strongly about this project. He has gone to visit the

workers, employees and hopefully one day the pensioners, who are ensuring that people in Quebec, and indeed all Canadians, can traverse this bridge knowing that they will be safe and secure and that they can get to and from their destinations over the course of the year, whether for work or with families, in a way that is fast and efficient. This is a result of the work on the government side.

I will speak at greater length about the concurrence report later in my remarks, but I want to begin by pointing out that the cost of the Conservatives' efforts to delay the government's business is very significant. Why?

We are in the course of debating Bill C-92, which, as I said earlier, is historic legislation that would help move forward the endeavour of reconciliation with indigenous peoples. It would ensure that we recognize their inherent right to self-government and self-determination on a matter that is so important and that disproportionately touches so many young indigenous children's lives. This has resulted from the barriers that have been erected within our system, consciously in the earliest days of this federation and less consciously and more systemically and subconsciously over time, but no less requiring significant action.

• (1210)

How will Bill C-92 allow us to move forward in a way that is positive and constructive?

Well, first it is important to point out that this is a piece of legislation that was co-developed with indigenous peoples, first nations organizations and stakeholders in a spirit of good faith and in a manner that would recognize the cardinal principle that indigenous peoples have the right to self-determine their own journey and path to success in this country. Without recognizing that, without understanding and appreciating that principle, all efforts will be undermined.

This legislation, then, was not simply the creation of a government that was insular and refused to reach out—quite the contrary. There were sincere efforts to co-develop and co-design this legislation, and this was a historic turning point for a matter that touches the lives of many indigenous children. To shed some light on the kinds of numbers we are talking about here, the overrepresentation of first nations, Inuit and Métis children in the child and family services system is not insignificant. That group represents 7.7% of the overall population in Canada but accounts for 52.2% of children in foster care in private homes.

That is a breathtaking number, a tragic number, and the objective of this legislation is to reduce that number as much as we possibly can.

How will we do so? It will be by ensuring that the best interests of indigenous children and youth are—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo is rising on a point of order.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I believe we have a concurrence debate happening. It would appear that my hon. colleague has moved into the speech on Bill C-92 he wanted to give, but his colleagues did not move the motion to get him there. Therefore, I am wondering if we could stick to relevance in the debate.

Routine Proceedings

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo for her intervention. Members know that the subject or question before the House is material to the debate and their remarks. I note that the hon. parliamentary secretary is only seven minutes into his time. He will know that the items he covers in his speech will ultimately need to be relevant to the matter at hand, so we will let him continue with his remarks and he will bring them back around on subject, I am sure, in the time ahead.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

• (1215)

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, of course I know that the hon. colleague who just posed the question would have heard a number of remarks I made at the outset of my commentary today and would know that I would be returning to the report. I would dispute my colleague's contention of the opportunity lost today to discuss the other government business, which is indeed of great importance to Canadians, including Bill C-92 and including the budget, which we are all very keen to hear about. Even some of her colleagues, in earlier exchanges within the context of the concurrence debate, which has been put forward by the Conservatives, accepted that it is of great significance that we get to debating the budget.

Let me round out my comments with regard to Bill C-92 with something that the hon. colleague who just posed the question is familiar with.

I was speaking about the importance of enshrining as a principle the best interests of indigenous children in the child and family services system. This legislation would help do that. It would also ensure that we are living up to our commitments under UNDRIP, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I note that it was something that the hon. colleague who just posed the question voted against, as did all of her Conservative colleagues. That was indeed regrettable, because we must ensure that Canada is making the strides that are necessary to achieve meaningful reconciliation, including responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, which again the Conservatives have found it quite difficult to come to grips with. There was also their reticence under the last administration to call for an inquiry into the missing and murdered indigenous women and children.

Those are concrete examples of how the Conservatives have seemingly found it difficult to make it right with indigenous peoples.

Conversely, on this side of the House, we understand that in order to make the progress that is necessary to make it right with indigenous peoples, we have to embrace those very principles and those initiatives, which we are doing, including with Bill C-92.

We also would not be able to move forward, if the Conservatives were to have their druthers and their way, with the budget. I am not going to pre-empt the Minister of Finance; certainly we do look forward to hearing from him at some point today on the next concrete steps that we will take to ensure that Canada is on a strong economic footing. However, it is worth pointing out just how strong this government's record has been with regard to the economy.

In 2015 we asked Canadians to trust us with the stewardship of the economy so that we could ensure that Canadians could have every conceivable opportunity to achieve success. How did we start

delivering? The very first thing is that we provided for a tax cut for approximately nine million middle-class Canadians, and by doing so we put more money in their pockets. How much more? Later this year, an average family of four will have approximately \$2,000 more in their pockets, money that they can spend on school supplies, on camps, on recreation, on clothing, on all of life's necessities. That is as a result of both the middle-class tax cut and the Canada child benefit plan, which has put more disposable income into the households of nine out of 10 families, something that we should be very proud of.

We have also reduced taxes for small businesses. I know that the Conservatives like to brand themselves as the great captains of enterprise and like to pitch that they support small business, but this government actually walks the walk when it comes to important policy decisions. We were very happy to see that the CFIB, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, came out as very supportive of reducing the small business tax rate to 9%, beginning on the first day of 2019.

We also have a serious plan when it comes to climate change. On the Conservative benches I can hear some of my friends chortling and heckling and I know it is all in good spirit and good humour, at least for the most part, but the reality is that within their own ranks they still have a hard time admitting that climate change is real, notwithstanding the fact that there is nearly unanimous evidence and science to back up that claim.

• (1220)

I think that explains why they are so reluctant to put forward any plan, let alone a serious one, that would do the kinds of concrete things that are required to protect the environment, while at the same time ensuring economic prosperity.

For our part, in addition to taking serious action to protect our marine habitat and our coastlines to the tune of nearly \$2 billion, we have also introduced historic legislation that would ensure there would be environmental protections and assessments in place. That was again backed by evidence. We worked with scientists and experts in the area. I know the Conservatives do not seem to like to refer to or give any acknowledgement to scholars. That seems to be quite difficult for them.

However, we worked with scientists and experts because we knew that by listening to them and by respecting their work, we were in a far better position to introduce legislation that is principled, like Bill C-69, which will ensure that there are environmental processes and assessments in place.

We are also putting a price on pollution. Once more, I would point out that there is nearly unanimous consensus that this is a smart way to go to reduce the amount of pollution in our environment. We will not hear any of that coming from the Conservatives. That again is a demonstration of how difficult it is for them to move forward with protecting our environment and acknowledging that climate change is real.

Routine Proceedings

On trade, we are the only G7 country to have a fair trade approach with every other G7 country. That is something to be quite pleased with. Our work in renegotiating NAFTA and our work in implementing CETA in Europe has all been to the good in enhancing and increasing consumer choice and expanding jobs.

On that point, and with respect to the budget, close to one million new jobs have been created since we took the reins of the government in 2015. That is far better than what Canadians were under the last Conservative government, which had the worst record for economic growth since the Great Depression. It is an ignominious record, which demonstrates how we are focused on actually producing results while they falter.

All of the examples I have put forward are a demonstration as to why the Conservatives do not want to talk about the budget and do not want to talk about Bill C-92. They do not want to talk about anything that reflects on the positive work. It is about obstructing and it is about obstructing the work of Canadians.

On the concurrence report, I know my Conservative colleagues are quite keen to talk about this matter today as opposed to what was the subject of debate and discussion at the parliamentary committee for transportation and, if I am not mistaken, already agreed to by the Conservatives, notwithstanding the fact that the Auditor General was very critical of the Conservative government's handling of the Champlain Bridge.

By way of background, the Champlain Bridge was less than 50 years old, but it had deteriorated very badly. At this point, I will quote from the Auditor General's report. It stated:

Heavy investments were required to repair and maintain it. If a structural problem forced the bridge to close, the four other river crossings in the area could not accommodate the displaced traffic without significant congestion. Even partial closures for brief periods or load restrictions could significantly affect the flow of people and goods through the region, and also affect the economy.

With respect to the procurement, I want to read from section 4.5 of the report and I will move on from there to conclude my remarks. This is with regard to the Conservatives' handling of the procurement of a private partner to do the work that was necessary to improve the Champlain Bridge. It states, "The government", and that is the Conservative government, "signed a contract, dated 16 June 2015, with Signature on the Saint Lawrence Group" or SSL as it is referred to. It went on to say:

The private partner undertook to deliver the project for just under \$4 billion, excluding the government's project management and land acquisition costs...The contract called for the new bridge to be ready for use by 1 December 2018. It included a 42-month construction period and a 30-year operation and maintenance period.

• (1225)

It goes on to state:

To manage the project, an integrated team of officials was drawn from five federal organizations:

From 2011 to 2014, Transport Canada was responsible for planning for the replacement of the bridge.

Infrastructure Canada took over in 2014.

Public Services and Procurement was the federal contracting authority for the project.

What did the Auditor General conclude with regard to the Conservatives' handling of the project? The Auditor General found

that the Government of Canada, the Conservative government of the day, was slow in making the decision to invest in the new bridge instead of maintaining the existing one. This finding matters because the delay in decision-making entailed avoidable expenditures of more than \$500 million.

It is rather curious that the Conservatives seemingly now want to draw attention to the fact that they slow-played the procurement process as a means of slow-playing the budget that we want to deliver, which will ensure there are more jobs, more opportunities and more prosperity for Canadians. What irony. What a demonstration that Conservatives have not taken any of the lessons that were handed to them in 2015.

It is regrettable and it is disappointing. I do hope we can move on from the debate of this concurrence report, so we can get back to Bill C-92 and budget 2019. That is what Canadians want us to do.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to what was a tangential reflection of what this debate is about. However, I noted the member talked about Bill C-92. Are the Liberals avoiding debating the bill because they are worried there are so many flaws in it, like in Bill C-91? It was unheard of that the government actually had to table over 30 amendments at clause by clause.

Are Liberals trying to avoid discussing Bill C-92 because they are worried they have again created legislation with so many flaws in it that they will be truly embarrassed when we have witnesses at committee pointing out all those important flaws in that legislation?

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, we actually tabled Bill C-92 yesterday.

It is the height of irony that during my remarks, when I began to talk about Bill C-92, that member across the way was admonishing me for raising Bill C-92 instead of talking about the concurrence report with regard to the procurement of a private developer on the Champlain Bridge, for which, the government of the day was heavily criticized by the Auditor General. Now the member is coming back to me, asking me why I did not speak more about Bill C-92. The member just interrupted me, and now wants me to return to the very matter which she wanted me to move on from.

Having said that, I am happy to talk about Bill C-92. This is historic legislation. It is historic because we co-developed it with indigenous peoples, because we reached out in good faith to organizations like the AFN and to local leaders, as well as local chiefs, to ensure that their voices were heard in the best interests of indigenous young children and youth, who are disproportionately overrepresented in our child and family services justice system. That is the work they need us to do, and we desperately want to do it.

I wish my hon. colleague would get her messages straight.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. His interest in and passion for Bill C-92 are quite remarkable. He seems keen to debate it. It is great to see. We all want to address the well-being of indigenous children.

Routine Proceedings

I have two questions for him. Why did it take three and a half years for his government to introduce this bill? Why not move on to government orders so that we can start discussing this seriously?

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

My colleague's passion cannot be beat. Everyone in the House knows now much enthusiasm and energy my colleague brings to the House and to debates.

On this side of the House, we want to keep our promises to Canadians. We want to begin the budget debate, but the opposition, the Conservatives are obstructing the debate. That is sad for Canadians, because they want us to make progress.

• (1230)

[*English*]

We want to debate the budget. We want to move forward with historic legislation when it comes to indigenous young children.

I do appreciate the passion that my hon. colleague brings to the House, but he should talk to his Conservative colleagues to move forward from this concurrence debate. It has already been debated in committee and it is not particularly helpful to be doing so today on a day when Canadians expect us to be delivering.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that answer makes no sense. That is at least the third Liberal speech I have heard where they say they want to talk about another bill. Then why do they keep making speeches? Why do they not use the tools they have at their disposal starting at the next intervention to move on to consideration of Bill C-92 if it is so important?

I have a hard time believing that the Liberals truly want to talk about Bill C-92 when it took them so long to introduce it in the House of Commons. The Liberals are doing nothing right now to move on to consideration of Bill C-92.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I keep being asked the same question, so I will give the same answer.

I encourage my colleague to speak with her Conservative Party colleagues. This is a Conservative motion. They are obstructing the proceedings to cause delays, which is preventing us from moving forward with what matters to Canadians in our budget.

The NDP members should talk to the Conservatives.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it would appear that the New Democrats have finally followed the debate from yesterday and now have recognized the Conservatives' intent to prevent us from debating Bill C-92. I hope the NDP will be consistent in ensuring we can make progress on Bill C-92 and other important government legislation.

It has become clear that the Conservatives only desire is to be as disruptive as possible on all government initiatives because they do not want to talk about the good, progressive policy initiatives in legislation or even in a budget to be presented later today.

With the official opposition in its own wonderland, trying to ramp up some sort of rhetoric on an issue that is not relevant in the minds of Canadians, could my colleague provide his thoughts on why it is so important we as government continue to remain focused on Canadians?

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to provide my thoughts on how important it is that we remain focused on Canadians, because we know what is at stake.

Yesterday, we heard the Prime Minister give a statement with regard to the tragic events in New Zealand, a statement that put into very sharp focus those elements that represent a threat to our democratic institutions. In order to achieve the kinds of results my hon. colleague just asked about with regard to the economy, trade, the environment, reconciliation and criminal justice reform, we need to unite together and push back on those people who have a toxic ideology that is motivated by hate and discrimination and by the attempt to divide one person from the next.

The Prime Minister called on members of every political stripe to fight against those movements so we could continue to ensure there was confidence in every democratic institution, including in the House. If we do so, we will continue to deliver for Canadians on the economy, create jobs and create prosperity. That is what this government is focused on and that is what we will be focused on in the next election and beyond.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague, the parliamentary secretary, is deviating from what this debate is actually about. If we are going to deviate, we need to deviate to the justice committee and the shameful shutdown.

He talks about glorious principles and says that we do not want to talk about the Liberal record. We do want to talk about the Liberal record. We want to talk about sunshine being a disinfectant, which the Prime Minister promised citizens in 2015.

If the parliamentary secretary wants to talk about higher principles, could he tell Canadians how the Liberals were able to shut down the justice committee? Sunshine it was not; a boatload of bleach it was.

• (1235)

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Speaker, there has been a lot of deviation by the member in terms of the subject matter she wants to question me about. First it was the concurrence report, then Bill C-92 and now the subject matter that is before the justice committee. Talk about being all over the map. This is another attempt to obstruct and disrupt, which is what we see from the Conservatives.

With regard to the work of the justice committee, it is operating independently. I am proud of the work that the Liberal members of Parliament have done on the committee. Indeed, they partnered in many meaningful ways with their Conservative and NDP colleagues with regard to the material witnesses who would be called. Canadians are better off knowing more about what occurred over the last number of months with regard to the SNC affair. That is a good thing. There is also the Ethics Commissioner's inquiry in which, again, witnesses will have every opportunity to provide evidence.

Routine Proceedings

However, the Conservatives' efforts to deviate from the work of this government, which is singularly focused on Canadians, will not succeed, because we have the best team, the best ideas and the best leader. That is what Canadians can count on going forward.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today and speak to the motion at hand with respect to SNC-Lavalin and the Champlain Bridge. We will have a lot to talk about over the next 20 minutes of debate and 10 minutes of questions.

This is the first time I have had a chance to rise in the House after the events that took place in Christchurch. I am hopeful you will allow me a few minutes to speak about that. Our condolences go to the victims, their families, and the Muslim community in Christchurch and around the world. The entire country of New Zealand is grieving, and we grieve with it.

Also, we need to always be mindful of those who rushed to the aid of victims to do whatever they could to save lives. Those are the first responders and the people who were on the scene immediately after the horrific events. We know the horrific sights and sounds they encountered will likely stay with them the rest of their lives. We should always take a moment to pause and reflect, and give thanks to our first responders. They run toward danger when many would run the other way. They see and experience things that most people can only imagine.

I also want to say that our thoughts are with the first responders and their families, because we know through the work we have been doing with respect to post-traumatic stress disorder that these incidents will stay with them and have a dramatic impact on their lives in the days, weeks, months and years to come.

Violent extremism has no place in our society. We must stand and act against systemic racism, religious intolerance, and discrimination against Muslims, Jews, Christians, Sikhs, Hindus and all other religious communities. We need to build a world where people of every faith can live in freedom and peace together.

I had an opportunity this weekend to speak at an event in Ottawa called ILEAD 2019. It was an event that was organized by Islamic and Muslim youth in the Ottawa area. There were almost 3,000 people from the Muslim community. There were leaders from all political stripes and all religious backgrounds. It was a powerful moment. We need to ensure that we are not just offering thoughts and prayers when we hear about events such as what took place in Christchurch or the Netherlands. As leaders, we must act to do whatever we can to mitigate hatred in our society.

We are here today to talk about SNC. I have listened to the debate. I have listened to the boisterous rants and interventions from colleagues across the way. Perhaps "rant" is a bit harsh, but it is as if they feel that if they speak louder, Canadians will listen to them and believe them a little more.

Today is about trust. That is where I want to focus my conversation with those who are listening in. We have a pretty packed gallery here today, with people who are listening in. Colleagues on all sides are riveted to this speech and Canadians should be listening to why what we are doing here today is important.

I will bring members back to the 2015 campaign. It seems like I say this far too often and it has become a bit of a repetitive rant, but it strikes to the core of why we are here today. The member for Papineau, our Prime Minister, told Canadians that his government would be the most open and transparent in the history of our country. He also told Canadians they needed to have trust in their government, and that his would work tirelessly to earn that trust.

● (1240)

The member for Eglinton—Lawrence said "trust us". He mentioned it a couple of times, that Canadians needed to trust that Liberals were working in their best interests. Canadians have seen over the last three and a half years that they cannot trust the government.

On day 10 of the campaign of 2015, the member for Papineau said his government would not resort to parliamentary tricks such as closure or omnibus bills. What are we seeing? Well, closure has taken place over 60 times. Why is that? The Liberals are threatening to do that again today. They have invoked closure because they do not like the narrative that comes out of this type of debate. However, that narrative gives Canadians a chance to hear the real story. That is very similar to what we have seen at the justice committee.

The Prime Minister's Office has lawyered up. The Ethics Commissioner was supposed to be investigating the SNC case, but he is on medical leave indefinitely now. I am being a little partisan, but the Clerk of the Privy Council gave a riveting testimony in the early days of the justice committee's SNC-Lav scam study. We heard yesterday that he has suddenly announced his retirement. It might not have been of his own volition, but he is retiring nonetheless.

We also found out yesterday that the Prime Minister has hired an independent outside entity to do the investigation. Who is it? Surprise, surprise. It is a former Liberal minister who was a colleague to some of the folks who are possibly involved in this, and who just recently was fundraising for the Liberal Party. This is as independent as the Liberals get; it is Liberals looking after Liberals.

I said before that it is open and transparent, but it is only open if one is a Liberal or a close family friend. They will get the contract or the quota. It is Liberals looking after Liberals. I do not have a crystal ball, but I guarantee the result will be that there is nothing to see here, to move on.

The former attorney general is still in the House and boy, did she speak truth to power a few weeks back. I hear laughing when I say that. The former attorney general gave powerful testimony for three hours and 40 minutes.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Todd Doherty: As colleagues across the way continue to poke fun and disparage her testimony, I hope the microphones can catch that.

Now we hear that the Liberal members on the justice committee have sent a letter saying there is nothing further to see here, and that Canadians want the justice committee to move on. The case is closed.

Routine Proceedings

This is after the former attorney general has stated publicly that there are answers to more questions that she needs to give, that she wants to be able to tell her side of the story. She cannot, regardless of what those across the way say. She cannot because she is bound by solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidentiality, and the Prime Minister refuses to let that happen. He says they have given her every chance, and he wants Canadians to trust him. It goes back to what I said earlier. Trust is why we are here today. I want to bring us back to the timeline that brought us to this point.

• (1245)

It was early 2015 when the RCMP laid a corruption charge against SNC-Lavalin. It was October 19 of that same year that there was a change in government. Canadians believed and bought hook, line and sinker that the current Prime Minister would back up the things he said he was going to do. On March 27, 2018, the Liberals tabled a budget bill and that included a change to the—

Mr. Dan Vandal: Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order. We were prepared this morning to discuss indigenous child welfare, which is a topic that is very relevant and that we co-developed with the indigenous community in over 70 meetings with over 3,000 people involved. The Conservatives do not want to talk about indigenous child welfare. They want to talk about the Champlain Bridge. I do not agree with that, but that is where this discussion is going. However, the hon. member is not talking about the Champlain Bridge. He is talking about information that is irrelevant, certainly to indigenous child welfare as well as to the Champlain Bridge.

The member should get back on the subject that we are here to speak on, ideally indigenous child welfare. I understand they do not want to talk about that, but at the very least he could talk about what they were advocating for two hours ago, which is the Champlain Bridge.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services for his comments. This has happened earlier in today's debate. I remind hon. members that the question before the House involves a debate on concurring in a committee report. Members are reminded to keep their remarks related to the question that is before the House, which is a normal part of our debate rules and procedures. Having said that, members will also know that members are given the freedom to mix those ideas in the course of their remarks so long as they are pertinent to the question that is before the House. Therefore, I would ask the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George to bring it back around to that subject and we will carry on from there.

The hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I will come back to what I said earlier, which speaks to the core of both Bill C-92, for our colleagues across the way, as well as the motion that we have before us. It is about trust and the lack of trust that Canadians have with the Prime Minister and indeed his team.

We are at a crisis of confidence right now. I am fairly young, but I remember a show called "I Dream of Jeannie". It is like the Liberals are trying to change the channel with a click and they are trying to change the narrative. Every time they try to do that it is because they don't want Canadians hearing the message that we have to say, because it is the truth.

Our colleague for Saanich—Gulf Islands does not often stand up in defence of the official opposition, the Conservatives, but we heard that earlier today when she asked how we had arrived at where we are today. It is because of the heavy-handed efforts and tactics that the Liberals and the government have used on the justice committee by not allowing testimony. All they need to do is to let her speak. Let the former attorney general speak.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Todd Doherty: The heckling is getting louder and they can speak as loud as they want. However, we are here today to talk about the broken promises that the Prime Minister and his team have levied against Canadians and the broken trust. They can shout all they want and they can heckle all they want. That means we are getting to them. It means that we are telling the truth. They do not know the truth, they cannot hear the truth, they cannot speak the truth and they cannot handle the truth.

Canadians deserve a chance to hear the truth. All the opposition has asked is for the former attorney general to be able to have that opportunity to come to committee and speak her truth. She says she has more to say. If the Prime Minister is not afraid of what she has to say, why not allow her the opportunity to come? He has muzzled her at every chance.

• (1250)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. You already ruled on this a few moments ago. The member opposite's remarks are not relevant to the current topic. Perhaps he could use his genie to bring him back on topic so that we can continue to debate what is meant to be debated today.

Mr. Speaker, I would like you to make a ruling on this and ask the member opposite to stick to the ruling you make.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands for his additional intervention on this. One of the difficulties with the standing order as it relates to relevance is that one actually has to hear what a member has said before one can understand the degree to which a member is on topic. I accept that the premise of the member's remarks is about questions of trust and that he has examples of other aspects of government decisions and so on.

Having said that, the member has about six minutes left in his remarks, and I believe he needs to make his ideas relevant to the question that is before the House, and he needs to do that soon.

The hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, in the final six minutes I have, I will tie this back to the debate. If only our colleagues across the way could just have trust that I am going to do that.

I want to bring up a comment that our colleague from Eglinton—Lawrence said in his intervention. He noted that today is a day when Canadians expect Liberals to deliver. Do Canadians not expect the Liberals to deliver every day? Sadly, we have not seen it. They want to change the channel.

Routine Proceedings

I am going to bring the House back to the early days of the government, when it introduced its Motion No. 6 to try to change the Standing Orders and our procedures. At that time, a minister was found guilty of using a limousine as a preferred choice of transportation and billing the taxpayers for that. We also found out that the finance minister had a French villa and he was found guilty. The Prime Minister was the first prime minister in the history of our country to be found guilty of ethics violations. I also have to mention the clam scam, which involved a former fisheries minister. They were all found guilty.

Now I will get to where we are today. Why do we find it challenging to believe what the Liberals say they are going to do? It is because they have not done it.

I would like now to talk about Bill C-92, which is what our colleagues across the way want. My comments are relevant, as it has been entered into the debate a few times.

I want to remind Canadians that it was the former Conservative government that signed a bilateral agreement with B.C., my home province, in 2012-13 to reimburse B.C. for child welfare services provided to 72 first nations communities. In our record as a Conservative team, we actually took into account the child welfare challenges.

I also want to bring our colleagues across the way back to—

• (1255)

Mr. Dan Vandal: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As parliamentary secretary to indigenous services, I note that we were here at 10 a.m. to discuss this important bill, Bill C-92, which is about indigenous child welfare. Those on the other side did not want to discuss it. They wanted to discuss the Champlain Bridge. Now the member opposite wants to talk about Bill C-92.

This is completely inappropriate. We should have been talking about Bill C-92 as of 10 a.m., but the Conservatives did not want to do this. The member opposite does not get the opportunity now to discuss Bill C-92, when we have not introduced it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his additional intervention on this. I have given a ruling on the relevance aspects of this particular debate.

As I mentioned earlier, this topic came up earlier from the other side with respect to the debate that is before the House. I asked the hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George to get back to the topic at hand. He continued to add his remarks but did so, in this case in particular, regarding a bill that was available for consideration during today's debate.

At this point, our time has exhausted and we are moving to questions and comments. We have about eight minutes for questions and comments, and that will bring us to the end of the time that is allocated for the concurrence debate today.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of his statement, the member took a considerable amount of time to talk about the events that unfolded in New Zealand, the way the world is reacting to it and, in particular, the way we should be reacting to it. Given that the member has demonstrated there is a need to take action, is he willing to stand and tell the House that it is time to put forward meaningful gun legislation or is he going to continue to hide behind the Conservative narrative that now would be an inappropriate time to do it because it would be politicizing the issue?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, let us talk about relevance. Now my colleague across the way wants to enter into a dialogue about gun violence and gun policy. Let us stay focused on my speech and the discussion we had here today. How many points of order were there during my speech? There were probably five, which used up a considerable amount of time. If those across the way do not like the message, this is exactly what they do, they try to change the channel and that is unacceptable.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for anybody watching this debate, I am sure it is not with great amusement.

The Liberals object to opposition members not talking about the Champlain Bridge, but they are definitely not talking about the Champlain Bridge when they stand to speak on this matter. They are talking about everything from Islamophobia to who knows what. The incredible thing is that the government has asserted its powers over and over again at committee and in this place to cut off debate. Liberals have the power to move a motion to adjourn the debate and go to the orders of the day. In this particular instance, they claim their priority is to talk about Bill C-92, yet they have sat there for how many hours now, choosing not to assert those powers for what they claim is a top priority: the rights and interests of indigenous children in Canada.

The big question I would put to my colleague is this. Why do the Liberals not want to talk about the Champlain Bridge and if they do not want to talk about the Champlain Bridge, why are they not asserting their powers in this instance instead of asserting their powers to shut down discussion about SNC-Lavalin at committee?

• (1300)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I could not have said it any better or more eloquently than my hon. colleague did.

The reality is that, as I said a few times, if the Liberals do not like the message or what members are saying, they always try to change the channel and the conversation. They want Canadians to believe their version of the story and the reality is that the only people telling the truth are those in the opposition.

*Routine Proceedings***Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):**

Mr. Speaker, members on the other side of the House really need to give their heads a shake. Think about it. For the last two days, the Minister of Indigenous Services and Liberal members have wanted to talk about Bill C-92, but the opposition continues to frustrate the debate by filibustering, by putting forward motions like the one today to talk about the Champlain Bridge. That is today; yesterday it was something else. They do not want to debate substantive legislation.

On one hand, opposition members say the Liberal government always uses tools to prevent them from speaking and, on the other hand, they ask why the Liberals are not using those tools. They are challenging us to do something they do not want us—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. It is very difficult to hear what members are saying when there is so much noise in the chamber. I would ask hon. members to keep their comments to themselves until they have an opportunity to speak.

The hon. member for Cariboo—Prince George.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I tried talking about the topic the Liberals wanted us to talk about early on, but there were five points of order. They did not want Canadians to hear the message we had regarding Bill C-92, apparently.

My hon. colleague across the way likes to scream and yell and perhaps Canadians will believe him a little more by doing that, but Canadians can see through this veil of the Liberals protesting far too much. They are not telling the truth and Canadians deserve the truth. All they need to do is to allow the former attorney general to speak.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, the other side was asking my hon. colleague a question related to the preamble in the speech the member was giving, which referred to the tragic events in New Zealand. In response to what happened in New Zealand, the member for Kingston and the Islands wants to implement more gun control, which is really more people control.

Why is it that the Liberals want to bring in more laws when, in response to acts of terrorism, they are not even enacting the laws themselves? For example, under section 83.181 of the Criminal Code, anyone who leaves or tries to leave Canada to commit an offence that is indictable in Canada is liable to imprisonment for up to 10 years. They just choose not to enforce the law. Why would we want to bring more laws forward when Liberals are not even applying the laws we already have on the books?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I am going to do the same as I did before.

I respect our hon. colleague very greatly, and I respect all of my colleagues, and inserting gun debate into my intervention has no place. I will not enter it into today's discussion.

• (1305)

The Deputy Speaker: The time for debate on the motion for concurrence has now ended.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I ask that the recorded division be deferred until tomorrow, Wednesday, March 20, after Government Orders.

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, March 20, after Government Orders.

I am curious as to members' wishes in this regard in terms of their standing at the request for a deferral. Something given to both sides is the ability to defer a vote until one day after the recorded division is requested. In this case, that has been adopted, the decision has been taken and the recorded division is deferred until tomorrow at the end of Government Orders.

* * *

PETITIONS

WORLD HUMAN VALUES DAY

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition given to me by Sathya Sai School, which organized the first Walk for Values in Toronto 16 years ago. This walk highlights five universal principles: truth, right conduct, peace, love and non-violence. It is the school's hope that the Government of Canada joins the five provinces and the 107 cities and towns that have declared April 24 as World Human Values Day.

FIREARMS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by Canadians from the ridings of Pontiac, Orléans and Hastings—Lennox and Addington. Petitioners call on the House of Commons to respect the rights of law-abiding firearms owners and reject the Prime Minister's plan to waste taxpayers' money studying a ban on firearms that are already banned.

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP):

Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from many people in British Columbia, who point out that the Canadian government declared the Sinixt tribal group extinct in 1956. However, this group has never ceased to exist as a tribal group, and Sinixt territory remains unceded.

Therefore, the petitioners call on Parliament to reverse the wrongful declaration of the extinction of the Sinixt people and tribal group and ask that it take immediate steps to recognize the Sinixt as an autonomous tribal group within their traditional and ancestral Canadian territory.

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition from citizens in my riding and all of Manitoba, including the communities of Brandon, Swan River, Pine Falls and Beausejour.

The petition points out that when local indigenous cultural artifacts are removed, it irrevocably damages the diverse regional and cultural traditions that have created a multicultural Canada and that the forcible removal of cultural property from the reach of indigenous communities is an act of colonization, which is wholly incompatible with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. This petition calls for western and indigenous artifacts to remain in Winnipeg.

• (1310)

MARIJUANA

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today, both pertaining to cannabis regulation. One is a petition for the inclusion of hemp-based products and the other protests the whole idea because it was such a mess.

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am presenting a petition today with regard to international trafficking in human organs. These individuals recognize there are two bills before Parliament right now that they would love to see passed quickly, which rarely happens. They are asking for Bill C-350 in the House of Commons and Bill S-240 in the other House to be passed quickly. They are urging Parliament to please amend the Criminal Code and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act to prohibit Canadians from travelling abroad to acquire human organs either removed without consent or as a result of a financial transaction, and to render inadmissible to Canada any and all permanent residents or foreign nationals who have participated in this abhorrent trade in human organs.

PHARMACARE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce two petitions to the House.

The first is signed by many people in Vancouver, including Vancouver Kingsway residents, pointing out that one in five Canadians has no prescription coverage whatsoever and that people should not have to struggle or avoid taking the medicine that they are prescribed by their doctors. Canada is the only country in the world with a public health care system that does not have some form of universal pharmacare, and they are asking the Liberal government to lower prescription drug costs for all Canadians and work with the provinces to implement a universal, comprehensive and public pharmacare system.

PENSIONS

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from pensioners across British Columbia who

Routine Proceedings

point out that before the last federal election Canadians were clearly promised in writing that defined benefit plans, which had already been paid for by employees and pensioners, should not be retroactively changed into target benefit plans. They have called on the Liberal government to withdraw Bill C-27, which they believe will negatively impact the retirement security of many Canadians and pensioners.

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present. The first is regarding conscience protection. It highlights the fact that the colleges of physicians and surgeons are forcing health care professionals, through an effective referral, to be part of assisted suicide—euthanasia—against their will. They are calling on this Parliament to enshrine in the Criminal Code the protection of conscience for physicians and health care institutions in order to protect them from coercion or intimidation.

SEX SELECTION

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second is a petition on gender-based violence. It highlights that there are some who prefer a boy over a girl, and through the use of sex selection, women and girls are being discriminated against. They are calling upon Parliament to condemn discrimination against girls occurring through sex selection.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a petition focusing on a national strategy of palliative care, recognizing that it is impossible for a person to give informed consent to assisted suicide or euthanasia if appropriate palliative care is unavailable to them. For many individuals in my community, I would like to put this petition forward.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also wish to table a petition from constituents across Canada. It is related to the recent decision by the Supreme Court, *Carter v. Canada*, to allow euthanasia and assisted dying for competent and consenting adults. These petitioners believe that without a national palliative care strategy and without resources from the government to ensure that adequate palliative care services are available, no consent can be given.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a very similar petition, because it truly is an issue for people across the country and especially in rural communities. The petitioners also are calling on a national palliative care strategy, and they believe that across Canada, whether people live in rural or urban areas, the federal government has a role to play in terms of a strategy.

Government Orders

●(1315)

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions.

One is regarding international trafficking of human organs removed from victims without consent. The petition is in support of Bill C-350 in the House of Commons and Bill S-240 at the Senate.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is in support of establishing a national strategy on palliative care.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the shadow minister for seniors, I think it is very important that the government establish a national strategy on palliative care. In the 41st Parliament, the House of Commons unanimously passed a motion calling on the government to create a national strategy on palliative care to ensure every Canadian has access to high-quality palliative care at the end of life. It is impossible for persons to give full consent to assisted suicide if appropriate palliative care is unavailable to them.

Mr. Don Davies: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce petition e-1528, signed by over 12,000 Canadians who are calling on the government to remove the excise tax, in fact all taxes—

The Deputy Speaker: Order. Under the Standing Orders, if a member wishes to present petitions more than once in the 15 minutes that we have available, we typically would need unanimous consent of the House to permit that. Is there consent to allow the member for Vancouver Kingsway?

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

AN ACT RESPECTING FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.) moved that Bill C-92, An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to open second reading debate on Bill C-92, an act respecting first nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families. Before I go any further, it is

important to recognize that we are gathered on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

My remarks today will focus on three key areas: first, how Bill C-92 aligns with this government's commitment to renewal of the relationship between Canada and indigenous peoples; second, the importance of child welfare generally and the necessity of cultural protections in child welfare regimes; and third, how implementation of this bill would allow for greater protection of vulnerable children, youth and families while recognizing and affirming the inherent right of indigenous peoples to self-determination.

I cannot in good conscience stand in this House today without recognizing the important work done by the member for Markham—Stouffville. The member got us started on this road, and we cannot forget her accomplishments as Canada's first minister of indigenous services. We are very grateful for what she did during her time.

While we are providing credit where it is due, I must acknowledge the role of the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations in bringing the bill forward. Her commitment to renewing the relationship between Canada and indigenous peoples is clear and it is unflagging. It is my pleasure to stand and recognize her contributions to the co-development of this important legislation.

Earlier I mentioned how Bill C-92 aligns with the government's progress on renewing Canada's relationship with indigenous peoples. Canadians are increasingly aware that indigenous issues are Canadian issues, that indigenous issues are critical to this country and that indigenous issues must be addressed. This government continues its strong commitment to these issues, because Canadians want it, because this country needs it and because, fundamentally, it is the right thing to do.

We have made historic investments to build and repair thousands of new and safe housing units in indigenous communities, like those I witnessed recently in Cat Lake. More importantly, we are delivering those investments through a new distinctions-based approach. There is no more one-size-fits-all approach that is supposed to work from southwestern B.C. to the far reaches of the Arctic to the tip of coastal Labrador. We have partnered with indigenous people to create a first nations-led housing strategy, the Inuit Nunangat housing strategy, and the Métis Nation's housing strategy.

●(1320)

[Translation]

All Canadians should have access to safe, clean drinking water. We are committed to delivering on that, and we are on track to be able to lift long-term drinking water advisories on public water systems on reserve by the end of March 2021, as planned.

Government Orders

We continue to invest in infrastructure in indigenous communities, including roads, schools, recreation centres and aerodromes, to name just a few. We are doing so because we realize that efficient infrastructure helps communities prosper. Thriving communities lead to activities, initiatives and growth that create economic development opportunities.

[*English*]

We know that the long shadow cast by decades of neglect will not be erased overnight. It will be difficult to reverse, but it is possible. It is essential that we take these steps now and in partnership, not with paternalism.

This government and this Prime Minister have committed, since the beginning, to a renewed relationship with indigenous peoples based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership. This bill is a wonderful example of this, and it is my hope, through this debate and with the support of members on all sides of this House, and in the other place, that with it ultimately passing, this bill could serve as an example of the type of work we need to continue doing.

Before getting into the minutiae of the bill before the House today, I think there may be some value in pulling back a little and speaking generally about child welfare and the emerging recognition of the importance of cultural stability being provided to children who are in care.

Interestingly enough, March is National Social Work Month in Canada. I say that because I think it is important for us to take a moment during this debate to acknowledge and appreciate the professional duties executed by social workers day in and day out right across this country. They are often placed in settings that most Canadians do not even know exist, and they are often forced to make difficult choices across stark options. They work within systems, and the decisions they make are often mandated by those systems. I want to be clear that when we talk about the need to address systemic faults, we do so without unduly criticizing those who work within those systems.

All that is to say that there is increasing acknowledgement in both the academic and operational worlds that current child welfare systems are failing indigenous youth.

Consider that less than 8% of this country's population is indigenous, but indigenous children make up 52% of children in care. That statistic is horrifying. That statistic is appalling. However, that is only part of the story. Far too frequently, non-indigenous social workers come into communities that are not theirs, apply an artificial standard without any context for the communities they are in, and take children away from their mothers, grandmothers and aunts. They take them away from their cousins and their classmates and bring them to another place where they are supposedly safe. They are safe, but alone; safe, but isolated from their culture; safe, but ultimately terrified. This happens because a child protection system built on a western and urban model has no place in indigenous communities.

Let us use my home province as an example. In Newfoundland and Labrador, once the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development has made the determination that a child is in need of

protective intervention, it assesses the availability of placement options. It is a four-level continuum that starts with family-based placements, then moves to non-family-based foster homes, then eventually moves to staffed residential placements. The issue, of course, is that in small isolated communities like Nain or Natuashish, the availability of placement options is exceptionally limited. That holds true whether or not a small community is an indigenous community. The smaller the town, the fewer the options.

What ends up happening, of course, is that kids who need protective intervention generally have to move away from their towns and into larger areas. If children are taken away from their families and placed with strangers, that has an incredibly traumatic impact on them as children. If children are taken away from their families and placed in a town where no one looks like them or sounds like them and no one understands where they are from, well, members get the picture.

Existing systems too often place a priority on an urban definition of "safety" while ignoring the developmental necessity of culture, of community, of language and of a sense of belonging. No good comes from stripping away children from everything and everyone they know. Sometimes it may be necessary, but it should not be the standard course of action. Unless we change how we operate child welfare for indigenous communities, we will continue to cause serious harm to individuals and communities.

This is beyond unacceptable. This is a humanitarian crisis. We must act. With the proposed bill in place, we would have a path forward with which we could achieve the fundamental reform required.

Let me turn our attention to how implementation of this bill would allow for greater protection of vulnerable indigenous children, youth, and families while recognizing and affirming the inherent right of indigenous peoples to self-determination.

First and foremost, Bill C-92 would help to ensure that indigenous child and family services would be based firmly on putting the child first, not on the convenience of the system; that they would be fully aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; a that we would provide clear affirmation of the inherent right of first nations, Inuit and Métis to exercise their jurisdiction in relation to child and family services, enabling communities to not only administer prevention and protection programs and services that reflect their customs, practices and traditions but to also enact laws in this area if they decided to do so.

● (1325)

The proposed process would not be a one-size-fits-all approach. Indigenous peoples could exercise partial or full jurisdiction over child and family services at their own pace. This would enable indigenous people to tailor the exercise of their jurisdiction to their needs.

Government Orders

In this legislation, we are setting out principles applicable, on a national level, to the provision of child and family services in relation to indigenous children and families. These principles would help ensure that indigenous children and their families would be treated with dignity and that their rights would be preserved. Some of these principles, for example, would help to ensure that indigenous children were not taken into care based on socio-economic conditions alone, as is happening right now. If children were apprehended, it would be in their best interest, and they would be placed with a family member or within the immediate community.

Rather than a system designed to respond to crises, we must enable a system focused on prevention. This legislation emphasizes the need for the system to shift from apprehension to prevention, with priority given to services that promote preventative care to support families. It gives priority to services like pre-natal care and support for parents. We know, academics know and front-line professionals know that preventative care is a leading indicator of child success and positive development.

The provisions in the bill respecting first nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families mark the beginning of a 180-degree turn, a turn away from a system that allowed residential schools to happen.

Bill C-92 also demonstrates the importance of a collaborative approach when looking at how legislation impacting indigenous peoples is developed. This legislation flows from an intensive period of engagement with first nations, Inuit and Métis leaders, communities and individuals, including the provinces and territories. This engagement would continue in the development and implementation of a new child and family services system, which the bill would enable.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

Indigenous families and communities are being torn apart. Indigenous children are being taken from their families and communities and deprived of their language and culture. Their rights as members of indigenous communities, as children and as human beings have been trampled on for too long.

This bill is in line with our government's commitment to a renewed relationship between Canada and indigenous peoples.

[*English*]

The bill recognizes the current systemic issues in child protection generally and reinforces the necessity of cultural protections in child welfare systems.

The bill would allow for greater promotion of vulnerable children, youth and families while recognizing and affirming the inherent right of indigenous peoples to self-determination.

Where capacity exists to build safe spaces for children and youth, where aunts, uncles, cousins and friends can come together in mutual support, and where communities want to end a cycle of child removal that creates lasting and widespread trauma, no children should be removed to spend their formative years in isolation, away from the supports they need to get the best start in life, away from the places where they belong. For children to go out and make their

way in the world, they must know their place in the world. They must know where they are from. They must know where they belong. They must know who they are.

Time is of the essence. We must work collaboratively and effectively. We must maintain this momentum. We must see this through. An entire generation of indigenous children and youth are counting on us to get this right, and we cannot let them down.

There can be no greater measure of a society than how we treat our most vulnerable, how we treat our children. Today we can stand a little taller, because today we are moving to make it right. We are working to make it right.

I urge all members to join me in moving toward an end to this crisis with their support for Bill C-92.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we believe that the principles are very solid in what needs to be done, moving jurisdiction and moving forward. Clearly, what has been happening for too many years is not acceptable.

I have a technical question. Jurisdiction has sat with the provinces for many years. Have the provinces committed to this, acknowledged it and supported this plan moving forward? I use British Columbia as an example. I like to think British Columbia has moved forward in a very good way with the devolution of services. We certainly do not want to disrupt some of the very positive measures that have happened. Therefore, to what degree have the provinces and territories been made aware and do they support the legislation as it sits?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Mr. Speaker, the engagements and discussions with the provinces and territories continue. This is not the end game. The legislation would provide a path forward.

I would also emphasize for those provinces and territories, and for those watching today, that they can make decisions based on the principles as they are currently outlined in the proposed legislation. We have doubled the amount of money for child and family services since 2016 to some \$1.2 billion. Therefore, we have the means there currently and are providing those principles, as the hon. member said, with which many are in agreement. Therefore, there is nothing to stop them.

Having said that, the hon. member is quite right. We need to work closely with the provinces and territories, and those conversations continue.

• (1335)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have waited many years for this legislation and I am encouraged. However, it must be said that Canada has not earned the right to be trusted by indigenous people. The government has not earned the right to be trusted. It spent over \$1 million fighting Cindy Blackstock in hearings, while children were dying. In the five non-compliance orders, we saw the government being called out again and again on putting its financial interest of saving money over the need to save children. It was found culpable in the deaths of Chantel Fox and Jolynn Winter in Wapekeka.

Government Orders

Therefore, I ask my hon. colleague this. If we are going to move forward, we need statutory guarantees of equity. We need to have the Jordan's principle rights put into law. Otherwise, we are carrying on with 150 years of nice talks from governments about how they are going to make things better with indigenous people. Without the statutory obligations, nothing changes.

I will end by quoting the Yellowhead Institute, which stated, "While Canada is presenting Indigenous jurisdiction as the main selling feature of this Bill, without adequate funding, this will simply be jurisdiction to legislate over our own poverty."

We will work with the minister. We will do whatever it takes to get this passed before Parliament rises. Will the minister commit to those statutory obligations to guarantee the bill works?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Mr. Speaker, the issue of funding is a very important one. However, it would be extremely presumptuous to determine what those levels should be ahead of time. We will be working with individual groups to assure them of the level of funding and to ensure they have it.

Jordan's principle is something that sweeps well beyond child and family services. It also enters into the fields of primarily health but also education and other fields with respect to governments work with indigenous groups. Therefore, Jordan's principle is not part of this. However, anybody who reads the legislation would realize that the principle of Jordan's principle is imbued within the legislation.

On the issue of financing, we will deal with that with the individual first nations, Métis and Inuit groups.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague mentioned a staggering number of 52% of children in care. When we look at the overrepresentation of children in Ontario's child protection system, it is black children. In the work conducted by Kike Ojo that looked at Toronto specifically, 42% of children in care have at least one black parent. That is more than five times the population of black children in that system.

Therefore, could the hon. minister talk about the lessons learned through this legislation that could translate to other communities that are really affected by a child welfare system that disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable in our communities?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Mr. Speaker, it is startling to think that of the \$1.2 billion toward child and family services since 2016, 80% of that goes toward what we call protective services, which is a nice way of saying apprehension or some may call it abduction. The idea behind this is recognizing and affirming the inherent right of indigenous groups to child and family services and in working with them to build that capacity so they do not see their children apprehended and taken away to places where they are not able to embrace their culture. The legacy of these apprehensions will live on for decades and we must put an end to them now.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, when the government speaks about principles, they are often very sound, but when it has translated principles into legislation, there has been huge challenges. Bill S-3, the gender equity bill, had so many mistakes and flaws that it was basically a disaster. I can look at the indigenous language act. The government is tabling 30 amendments as we head into clause-by-clause, and that is unheard of. We have important principles, but

already we are hearing significant concerns from people who will be impacted by the bill.

Would the minister consider not only tabling the charter and constitutional compliance statement that is part of any legislative process, but also commit today that the Liberals will be open to appropriate amendments as we move forward?

• (1340)

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Mr. Speaker, I fundamentally agree with the hon. member in the importance of consultation and of getting it right. I will quote from Perry Bellegarde, the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, who said:

This legislation is first and foremost about First Nations children and their safety, their security and their future....The tragedy of thousands of First Nations children in care tells us we need a new approach. This legislation will recognize First Nations jurisdiction so they can build their own systems based on their own governance, laws and policies. Our focus has to be on prevention over apprehension, and keeping children close to their cultures and families. We need investments to support this work, and we need everyone to support this approach. The time is long overdue for First Nations to finally regain responsibility over our children.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is good that we finally get to debate the bill, although there is great concern that we have the budget coming down this afternoon and we presume there will not be any new monies because we do not have this enacted yet.

More than a year and a half ago, the former attorney general undertook that going forward all federal legislation would incorporate the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, yet here we again have a bill directly impacting indigenous Canadians and it simply stops at the preamble that is non-binding.

Why does the government still refuse to make the United Nations declaration binding in Canadian law?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan: Mr. Speaker, the most important thing we can do is to listen to indigenous groups and we have done that, having read Perry Bellegarde's quote on his reaction to this legislation.

I will also speak to President Natan Obed of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, who said:

I am encouraged by ITK's relationship with...the Department of Indigenous Services and anticipate further discussions between Inuit leadership and government as this legislation moves forward...With today's announcement, the level of ambition of both Inuit and government have aligned to do more to protect Inuit children.

President Chartier from the Métis National Council said:

Time is of the essence in acting on the crisis of Métis children in care and ensuring the right of Métis governments to establish and maintain their own child welfare agencies....The proposed legislation is a necessary and long overdue first step to achieve that.

Government Orders

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too am very pleased to rise in the debate on Bill C-92 today. I note there is concern that the bill is arriving so late in this parliamentary agenda. There are only 10 weeks left. This was promised a number of months ago, and it finally was tabled just recently.

Having said that, we intend to be productive and proactive in supporting this, at least in principle, and seeing where we can go. Again, the government has a history of having important principles, but those principles have not always translated into legislation.

We all know the tragedy and the genesis for that, based in the residential school system, based in the sixties scoop, and it predates many of those issues. Again, I always like to reflect on my own experiences.

In the 1980s, as a nurse moving into a community, I was told that social and child welfare workers were not welcomed on reserve because they took their kids and so they could not come onto the reserve. In actual fact, the social workers of the provinces did not go onto the band lands at that time.

I look at where British Columbia, as an example, has come since that time, from a place where it was a very tense, taut relationship that could have ended in violence had people entered band lands. It ended up in a better place. Every province is a bit different in where people have ended up.

In the riding I represent in Kamloops, Secwépemc Child & Family Services now provides services both on and off reserve for its community members. For those people, this bill would be another step forward in the evolution of what the service is doing and how it is doing it. Certainly I want to congratulate the communities for coming such a long way from the 1980s to where we are in the 2000s. Things are not where they need to be, but they are certainly much better than they were.

I want to also make a contrast. We do not know the whole story, but many of us saw the video at Christmas time, showing the removal of a newborn baby from her mother and her family. Again, we do not know the back story, but we all looked to that and felt grief and wondered what had happened and what needed to be done to make it better.

The minister talked about the social workers and held them up with respect to working under the structures of the day, for which the government needs to be responsible. I also want to acknowledge adoptive parents across the country who opened up their hearts and their homes. Maybe they could not have a family of their own and they wanted one to love. They wanted to do the right thing. I want to hold them up because many families adopted children and many fostered children. In the community I represent, many of these families tried their best to ensure the children remained connected with their culture and kept the ties.

As we move forward, this is not about not respecting the work that social workers have done and not about not respecting the families that have adopted children. It is about knowing we can do better, that there are ways we can focus on prevention and do better for the children. Keeping them and supporting them connected to their culture and community is absolutely critical.

The Minister of Indigenous Services acknowledged the work of the former minister. In January 2018, an emergency meeting was held with Indigenous Services, the federal and provincial counterparts.

• (1345)

At that time, they all recognized that they needed to shift the programming focus to prevention, early intervention, supporting communities to draw down the jurisdiction and exploring the potential for co-developed child legislation, which is, of course, what we are here to talk about today.

Before I talk specifically about some of the technical details in the proposed legislation, I think it is important to reflect on the past government's record in this area. The Liberals like to portray themselves as the only people who have ever cared about this issue, the only group that has actually moved forward, recognizing that this is an important issue. It has been an evolution. I explained how it was in the 1980s. However, I will look at what the record was in terms of the evolution of the former government.

We signed a bilateral agreement with B.C. in 2012-13 to reimburse B.C. for the child welfare services that it provided to the 72 first nations. The funding streams were similar to what first nations and child and family services agencies received under directive 20-1, which goes way back. It provided a lot more flexibility with respect to the funding arrangement and the increased amount of funding that was available.

We also started what we called the enhanced prevention focused approach, which was launched in 2007 in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia; Quebec and P.E.I. in 2009; and Manitoba in 2019. This EPF approach was intended to provide a more flexible funding model and refocus child welfare to a family-centred practice with child-centred outcomes. It relied on a more intensive involvement of social workers to provide support before families reached a crisis. It was intended to reduce the need for placement of children, but where placement was necessary, it also explicitly favoured kinship and community placement over foster care and institutional care. It also started tracking meaningful performance indicators.

Members can see that we had taken some principles that had been evolving over time. Again, some provinces are certainly more advanced in working in partnership with their first nations communities and the federal government. However, we put it into legislation. Moving those principles into legislation and reaffirming the jurisdiction cleared up a whole lot of confusion that might have been there in the past.

Government Orders

Again, there was talk about the funding. The funding did change significantly over that time. Of course, it needed more enhancement, but there was a 50% increase in funding. However, more important is that there were some results. We saw the percentage of children who were placed in foster care decrease. I would find it very valuable to get from the minister the trend line to see if it is still heading in the right direction. The percentage of children in kinship care increased and, again, we saw some changes in the proper direction. My point is that we are talking about what has been too slow an evolution, but certainly, hopefully, an evolution in the appropriate direction.

What would the bill before us actually do? This is where I think there is going to be a lot of scrutiny, not only in the House at second reading debate but, importantly, in committee where we get those experts to come and share with us what is good about the bill and where it has not been crafted in a way that would do the job.

● (1350)

The bill would affirm the jurisdiction of indigenous peoples in relation to child and family services, which has always been a very difficult grey area because the provinces have said that, under the Constitution, we need to be responsible and the federal government has been inconsistent in its role. Sometimes the government says it provides services on reserve but does not have responsibility off reserve, so it is very confusing. The bill needs to affirm the jurisdiction and to get rid of the confusion between the provinces and the federal government.

The bill sets out really important principles, such as the best interests of the child, cultural continuity and substantive equality, which is applicable on a national level to the provision of child and family services in relation to indigenous children.

The key elements of the bill that we have talked about are that it would affirm the jurisdiction of indigenous peoples to make laws in relation to child and family services, along with the authority to administer and enforce these laws consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It would commit to not interfering with existing rights in self-government agreements enacted by indigenous governing bodies regarding child and family services. That is an area we need to delve into. If relationships have already been established, we need to make sure it does not erode things that are working well and moving forward.

The area that Conservatives are concerned about is that it be binding on the provinces and territories. I do not think there are any challenges in terms of communities on reserve taking care of their memberships off reserve where they have drawn down services, but I hope the Liberal majority will allow constitutional experts and the provincial ministers to talk about the constitutionality of that particular issue. When a province provides services, is there agreement with all of the provinces in terms of the bill and is it constitutional to impose it on them when they have the jurisdiction for delivering services? I am not a legal expert, but it is a question I have about the bill and a legitimate question to ask. We need clarity. We need to make sure we are being consistent.

The bill includes a rule of precedence, which would stipulate that where indigenous governing bodies have made laws with respect to child and family services, they would have precedence over other

laws relating to child and family services where conflicts arise. This is among the key elements.

Again, I am disappointed. I am disappointed that it has taken so long to table the bill. There is an agreement in the House that when a bill is tabled on a Thursday, my caucus gets to look at that bill on Wednesday so that all of my caucus members have the benefit of understanding what the bill looks like before it is debated in the House. That agreement is pretty fundamental to the proper functioning of the House and the Liberal government violated that agreement with this legislation. It was tabled on a Thursday and there has been no caucus meeting since. There was a commitment that we would discuss the bill after we had caucus meetings.

This is following a pattern. Because the Liberals have not been able to manage their House time, it does not constitute an emergency on our part and they should be respectful. If they want co-operation, they need to respect these basic elements and provide us an opportunity. For many years, members have respected the Wednesday rule and Liberals regularly violate it.

My other concern I talked about before. When Bill S-3 was introduced, it was great. The bill was a response to gender inequity in some legislation and the Liberals guaranteed us there would be technical briefings. In the House, they guaranteed they had fixed the problem. What happened? When we went into committee, we started to identify flaw after flaw after flaw.

● (1355)

The indigenous languages legislation was tabled in the House. The Liberals said it was co-developed and everything was great. We started to hear witnesses at committee, and there was flaw after flaw after flaw. There were 30 amendments, and I have said this a number of times today. It is unheard of for a government to have to make 30 fixes to its own legislation, and those 30 fixes were tabled late. It did not even meet the deadline. They have to table it in committee on the day we are heading into clause-by-clause. It is unheard of incompetence.

We support the principle. We want the legislation to move forward. We want to see things improve. However, we are a little leery of the ability and the competence of the government to get it right.

● (1400)

The Speaker: The member will have four minutes remaining, following question period, when the House next engages in this topic.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[English]***MACDONALD, DETTWILER AND ASSOCIATES**

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 50th anniversary of MacDonal, Dettwiler, a B.C. company that launched Canada as a world leader in space, telecommunications, earth observation and robotics.

In 1963, UBC engineers were able to map the ionosphere when NASA could not. Two of them began MDA, and its contributions to the aerospace sector have been groundbreaking. MDA's robotics capabilities led to the invention of the Canadarm, the first-ever in-space servicing system. They then went on to develop the Cassiope system for rapid uploading and downloading of massive data.

Today, MDA is a global leader in space technology, dedicated to a resilient, rich and competitive industrial base across Canada.

I would like to wish a happy 50th anniversary to MDA. As Canada recommits to space exploration, we know MDA will be there to boldly go where no one has gone before.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every year I send out a survey to my constituents, asking for their thoughts on important issues. In the spirit of budget day, I want to share some of what I have heard so far from this year's survey.

The feedback was clear. Eighty-two per cent of the surveys received back thus far express concern over deficits, and 75% do not support the Liberal carbon tax cash grab. What is tough to hear is that over 71% say life is less affordable today than it was four years ago.

Middle-class families in Flamborough—Glanbrook and across this country are juggling mortgages and increased commuting costs. They are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet.

It is clear to me what the people of Flamborough—Glanbrook do not want to see in the budget today. They do not want more deficits; they do not want more tax increases, and they do not want a carbon tax.

* * *

FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, I attended my first Fridays for Future rally in downtown Toronto. Fridays for Future is a movement that was started by 16-year-old Greta Thunberg, who skipped school to protest the lack of action on the climate crisis. This protest has turned into school strikes every Friday by youth across Europe and around the world, including here in Canada. In Toronto, over 200 youth and parents attended the rally to send a clear message that Canadians want action on climate change.

I spoke about what our federal government is doing to tackle climate change, which includes putting a price on pollution, making

historic investments in public transit, phasing out coal, transiting to 90% green energy by 2030, and investing \$1.3 billion in biodiversity, among many other actions.

Unlike the Conservative Party, which has no plan to fight climate change, we are taking action. As Greta has said so eloquently, “Yes, we do need hope...but the one thing we need more than hope is action. Once we start to act, hope is everywhere. So instead of looking for hope, look for action. Then and only then, hope will come.”

* * *

FOREST INDUSTRY

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the forest industry in B.C. has had some tough years recently. Beetles and forest fires have reduced the timber supply, so we must create more jobs for every tree we cut.

There was some good news out of British Columbia last week.

First, Kalesnikoff Lumber announced that it is building a mass timber plant in my riding at South Slokan, to create cross-laminated timber panels and glulam beams. These components are at the centre of a revolution in how the world is constructing buildings. Canada is leading the pack in North America in this technology, with companies like Structurlam in Okanagan Falls and now Kalesnikoff joining those leaders.

Second, the B.C. government announced changes to its provincial building code, allowing beautiful and safe mass timber buildings to be constructed up to 12 storeys.

Along with those in my private member's bill, Bill C-354, these changes encourage the use of environmentally friendly materials in building federal government infrastructure, and will help keep the forest industry healthy.

* * *

FLOOD PREVENTION

Hon. Kent Hehr (Calgary Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in 2013, Calgary was devastated by a massive flood. The communities I represent, including Beltline, Rideau-Roxboro, Inglewood and Ramsay were all under water. People were evacuated; lives were put on hold and the city was virtually shut down.

Statements by Members

In 2015, the Prime Minister came to Calgary, promising to keep our city safe from flooding. It was a promise made and a promise kept. Last week, I announced \$168 million from our federal Liberal government for the Springbank off-stream reservoir. Once completed, these measures and our previous investments will protect thousands of people and their homes, schools and businesses from future flooding.

The previous Conservative government invested a grand total of zero dollars in flood mitigation. We are changing that and investing in Calgary in a big way.

* * *

• (1405)

ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES FLIGHT 302

Mr. Len Webber (Calgary Confederation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, March 10, Ethiopian Airlines flight 302 crashed and claimed the lives of 157 people, 18 of them Canadians.

My eldest daughter Lauren worked for the United Nations World Food Programme. She lost seven close colleagues and a dear friend, 25-year-old Stephanie Lacroix from Timmins, Ontario. She was on a mission to Kenya with the United Nations Association in Canada.

Despite this profound loss for the United Nations community, its work will continue. It must continue, as many more lives depend on it. Every day, these brave souls sacrifice a great deal to serve their fellow human beings and to make the world a better place.

We mourn the lives ended too soon, but we must also celebrate their contributions and honour their memory by supporting the goals they worked so hard to achieve.

May dear Stephanie rest in peace. May all who perished rest in peace.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight some of the great work that the students of the youth council in my riding of Kingston and the Islands are doing. They have spent months studying what the federal government does and talking about the issues that are important to them. One of the common themes was discussions about a desire to do something about our environment. These students recognize the importance of acting today, not tomorrow.

With over two million single-use plastic bags circulating worldwide every minute and over one billion plastic bags being distributed annually in Canada, they believe it is imperative that we put an end to this pollution. That is why I am happy to share that my youth council has created an e-petition asking the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to enact a ban on the production and distribution of all single-use plastics. Some may call these students the leaders of tomorrow, but I believe that through their actions they are the leaders of today.

I would like to congratulate my youth council on its hard work and ask all Canadians to consider signing the petition.

[Translation]

JEAN PATENAUDE

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, volunteers play an important role in our communities, and that is very true in the riding of Shefford.

I would like to pay tribute to Jean Patenaude, an exceptional man who made an enormous contribution to the development of many young hockey and baseball players in the Granby region over the past 60 years. An impressive number of people from Granby can attest to the positive impact this man made on their young lives.

That is why the City of Granby decided to name the main rink at the Centre sportif Léonard-Grondin in his honour. This well-deserved recognition was celebrated at a ceremony organized by the Patenaude family. Through his extensive involvement, Jean Patenaude has had a major, positive impact on the lives of many members of our community.

My dear Jean, the young boy in me who trained every Saturday morning at the rink wholeheartedly thanks you.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with detail after detail, the SNC-Lavalin scandal has shocked Canadians. Every step of the way, the Prime Minister has acted like someone with something to hide. His story has changed multiple times, and he has pointed his finger in every direction.

The former attorney general testified that she was subject to repeated pressure from the Prime Minister and his inner circle to interfere in the criminal prosecution of a Liberal-connected firm.

We know there is more, but the Prime Minister refuses to allow her to tell her whole story. Now he has directed Liberal justice committee members to stop their investigation into his government's corruption.

Meanwhile, his office has lawyered up, our allies are flagging Canada for corrupt practices, two cabinet ministers have resigned on principle, and his top political advisor and the top civil servant have also resigned, yet the Prime Minister would have Canadians believe there is nothing here.

Nobody is buying it, and Conservatives will continue to fight to get to the bottom of it.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call the attention of the House to the plight of renowned Iranian civil rights lawyer Ms. Nasrin Sotoudeh.

Statements by Members

Human rights activists around the world were appalled to hear recently that this courageous lawyer has been sentenced to 38 years of imprisonment for having merely pursued her noble calling of defending the voiceless in Iran. Most recently she acted as a lawyer for women who sought to exercise their inalienable right to remove their hijabs.

A recipient of the prestigious Sakharov human rights award for her tireless advocacy, Ms. Sotoudeh is a paragon of strength and integrity. Her baseless and arbitrary sentence is defenceless and an egregious violation of the most fundamental of human rights.

As Canadians, we have always stood tall in defending towering figures who have proven to be tireless champions for the rights of others. As such, we should be resolute and spare no effort in joining the international—

• (1410)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Steveston—Richmond East.

* * *

SHOOTINGS IN NEW ZEALAND

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like all Canadians, I was appalled by the terrorist attacks on two mosques in New Zealand, where 49 people were killed and many injured as they went about their Friday prayers.

I wish to extend my deepest condolences to the families and friends who lost loved ones in this senseless tragedy. Canadians join with Muslim communities around the world in their grief, and stand with them at this incredibly difficult time.

I stand in solidarity with my friends at the Jamea mosque and the Az Zahraa Islamic Centre in Richmond during this time of shock and grief.

Attacking people in a place of worship is deplorable and despicable. Hatred has no place in our society. We must confront Islamophobia and work together to create a world where all people can feel safe and secure.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister continues to cover up the worst elements of the SNC-Lavalin scandal: gag orders, blaming whistle-blowers, closed-door meetings, shutting down debate and silencing key witnesses. These are the actions of a man who absolutely has something to hide.

We have seen four high-level resignations already: two cabinet ministers, a principal secretary, and most recently the head of the public service. This is evidence that the scandal is real and infests the highest level of the Liberal government.

Today the Prime Minister is trying to distract Canadians from his corruption with an election-year budget. Canadians will not and are not going to buy it, and certainly not when Anne McLellan, who was a cabinet minister during the Liberal ad scam scandal, is brought in to investigate her own Liberal friends.

What is certain is that the budget will not balance itself today, and Canadians will not be distracted by Liberal deficits and debt.

Conservatives will not be intimidated. Canadians want us to get to the bottom of the SNC-Lavalin scandal, and that is exactly what we are going to do.

* * *

MONTREAL ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Sunday I joined thousands of Montrealers in my riding, along with the Minister of Justice, for the 196th Montreal St. Patrick's Day parade.

St. Patrick, of course, was an immigrant and a slave who became the emblem of a country. This Montreal institution is the longest-running, uninterrupted St. Patrick's Day parade in North America and has been held, without exception, every year since 1824.

[Translation]

The 196th annual parade, an important celebration of Quebec's Irish community, was well attended as usual. Each year, this event brings together thousands of Montrealers and visitors to celebrate one of our city's founding peoples. Let us not forget that the Irish famine refugees doubled the population of Montreal in a two-year period in the late 1840s.

[English]

I would like to thank the organizers, the United Irish Societies of Montreal, as well as the thousands of participants and the hundreds of volunteers who make this event a success year after year. *Sláinte.*

* * *

[Translation]

COMMUNITY OF HOCHELAGA

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last winter, a massive blaze broke out at 3629 Sainte-Catherine Street East, forcing all the tenants to evacuate. This rooming house was home to many marginalized people living with housing instability. Mental and physical health issues, prostitution and drug use are part of their everyday lives.

Some of these residents ended up on the streets. There is a shortage of social housing, so it is important to save rooming houses, especially for people living on the fringes of society.

With the opioid overdose crisis in full swing, the 3629 project will increase the supply of social housing by creating a rooming house that is owned and operated by L'Anonyme, with a harm reduction approach.

My team and I have been working with local stakeholders for nearly two years to develop this new social rooming house model.

I am extremely proud of the community of Hochelaga, which is innovating once again, and I hope that the federal government will provide us with financial support.

•(1415)

[English]

YORK-SIMCOE BY-ELECTION

Mr. Scot Davidson (York-Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the voters of York-Simcoe for their support in electing me MP during our recent by-election.

I am so grateful for the unwavering support from my family and friends and for the hard work my campaign team accomplished as we knocked on thousands of doors and my constituents told me their concerns. The hard-working people of Georgina, East Gwillimbury, Bradford, Georgina Island and all across York-Simcoe are clearly worried about the Liberal government's out-of-control spending and rising debt and what it will mean for their children's and grandchildren's future.

They are concerned that the carbon tax will make things more unaffordable for everyday life, and they are tired of ongoing government corruption and scandals. The people of York-Simcoe are tired of just getting by. Instead, they have chosen Conservative leadership to get ahead, and I am on their side.

* * *

[Translation]

BY-ELECTION IN OUTREMONT

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am deeply honoured to rise as the member of Parliament for Outremont. I want to thank all the voters and assure them that I will work very hard to do a good job of representing them.

I also want to thank the Prime Minister and all the members of our caucus who came to visit my constituents with me.

[English]

I look forward to doing it all again very soon.

I must say that I am very privileged to represent such a diverse riding and to work with so many different cultural communities. I will continue to fight discrimination and hate by working with these communities, by building bridges, and by standing up for the rights and freedoms that we all have.

From all of our constituents, I came here with a clear mandate to get things done and focus on the real priorities of middle-class Canadians.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has appointed a former Liberal minister from the sponsorship scandal era to examine his corruption scandal. The Liberals who sit on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights shut down the committee's work on this matter. Not only is that an affront to democracy, it is also an abuse of power and

Oral Questions

an attack on Parliament designed to prevent Canadians from hearing the truth.

What is the Prime Minister trying to hide?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I accepted responsibility for the erosion of trust between the former attorney general and my office. That is why it is important that the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights be able to hear the testimony of witnesses. That is why we took the unprecedented step of waiving cabinet confidence and solicitor-client privilege.

The committee has been studying this matter for five weeks. Canadians heard all points of view. The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner continues to look into the matter.

We have said from the beginning that it was and is up to the Attorney General to decide whether to pursue a remediation agreement.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is just not true. Liberals carefully limited what the former attorney general was able to speak about. They prevent her from disclosing key information during the time after which she was fired as attorney general and the day that she resigned.

Now, what happened in that space of time that the Prime Minister is so desperate to hide? He has gone to great lengths to protect that information. What is he trying to hide?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government took the unprecedented step of waiving solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence so that the former attorney general could speak fully to this matter before the committee. The matter before the committee was heard over the course of five weeks. The committee heard multiple testimonies, and indeed the Ethics Commissioner is continuing his work on the matter.

We have confidence in our committees, we have confidence in our officers of Parliament, and we will continue to focus on what matters to Canadians.

•(1420)

The Speaker: Order, please.

I would ask the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes to come to order and not interrupt when someone else has the floor. I have no trouble hearing the questions and I should be able to hear the answers equally well.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is just not true. The former attorney general was not able to speak fully about the events that happened. In fact, in a letter to her own constituents, she wrote, "These matters are still unfolding, and further clarity and information is needed."

If the Prime Minister is so sure that he has done nothing wrong, then why will he not allow the former attorney general to finish her story?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we waived cabinet confidentiality and solicitor-client privilege so that the former attorney general could speak fully to the matter that was being studied by committee, and that is exactly what happened.

What is happening today is that the Conservatives are desperate to talk about anything other than the federal budget. They do not want to talk about the Canadian economy, and the reason is that they have no plan for the Canadian economy. Their approach under Stephen Harper failed to trickle down any benefits to the middle class for 10 years, and we have created growth and benefits.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is desperate to talk about anything other than the corruption scandal that has brought down two ministers, his principal adviser and the Clerk of the Privy Council. Canadians know that he is trying to hide something, and they know that the former attorney general has more to say. At committee she said that she was not at liberty, due to confidences, to discuss any of the matters that she now indicates she would like to.

The deputy leader of the Conservative Party asked if she would come back if she was allowed to, and she wrote that she would.

Why is the Prime Minister so desperate to prevent that from happening?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives do not want to talk about the economy, and one can wonder why.

Today is budget day. Every year the federal government puts forward a budget, a plan for the future of our economy, to grow the economy to benefit Canadians. In this House, the role of the official opposition is to challenge that vision. It is to look at how it would do things differently. However, the opposition does not even want to talk about it. Why? It is because it has no plan for our economy, and we have grown the economy and created jobs.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is going to such great lengths to prevent the full story from coming out, and in a few hours we will find out just how much it is going to cost Canadians to distract from his own corruption scandal.

He has lost two ministers and his principal adviser. He has lost the Clerk of the Privy Council. They are now lawyering up in the Prime Minister's Office, and he has instructed his members on the justice committee, behind closed doors, to shut down the investigation.

What could he possibly be trying to hide that is worse than all of those things happening already?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite just admitted that he does not want to hear what is in the budget coming up in a few hours. The reason is that Conservatives do not understand that investing in the middle class is the way to grow a stronger economy. That is what has created over 900,000 new jobs. That is what has led to the lowest unemployment in almost 40 years.

Our plan is working to help the middle class. The Conservatives' plan to give advantages and benefits to the wealthy failed under

Stephen Harper, and it is failing them now to actually even be able to talk about the budget.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

I encourage the hon. member for Carleton and others not to interrupt when someone else has the floor. I am sure they would not want anyone to interrupt them.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that appointing a former Liberal cabinet minister is a weak attempt to change the channel from the scandal. It does not get to the bottom of Liberals' giving special access to big corporations, quietly passing laws when powerful lobbyists ask and potentially interfering with a criminal trial.

People deserve answers. Why will the Liberal Prime Minister not call for a public inquiry? What is he so afraid of?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is puzzling in this whole thing is that I could see the Conservatives not standing up for workers, but not the NDP not standing up for workers and not standing up for jobs across the country.

We have always, and we will consistently stand up to defend workers and stand up to defend hard-working Canadians and the communities they support. We will be unequivocal about making sure that we are growing the economy and creating jobs like the 900,000 new jobs we have created over the past three years. We will continue to focus on what matters for Canadians, because that is what Canadians expect.

[Translation]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's interference scandal is costing him dearly. In the past month, he has lost two cabinet ministers, his chief adviser and, now, the Clerk of the Privy Council. He has also lost the confidence of Canadians.

What is his solution to this problem? It is a former Liberal minister and party fundraiser.

Why does the Prime Minister believe this will restore Canadians' confidence?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, instead of talking politics, the member should focus on what Canadians have gained.

We have created over 900,000 new jobs in this country over the past three years. We have lifted over 300,000 children out of poverty across the country. We have lifted nearly 825,000 people out of poverty thanks to our policies and Canadians' confidence in their families, their communities and their future.

We will continue to stand up for workers and invest in Canadians. That is what Canadians expect, and that is what we will keep doing.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister must explain himself to Canadians.

Oral Questions

The Prime Minister is caught up in a political interference scandal. It is alleged that he snuck legislation through to help his rich friends.

How can he believe that Canadians would trust a former minister from the sponsorship scandal era to discover the truth?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to see the member opposite tell SNC-Lavalin employees across the country, not just in Quebec but also in Newfoundland and Labrador, Regina and Grande Prairie, Alberta, that he does not care about their jobs.

We on the government side will always stand up for jobs. We will always respect our institutions and the rule of law. We will continue to stand up for jobs and invest in jobs. Other people may not like it, but we will continue to work for Canadians.

[English]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge will come to order.

The hon. member for Burnaby South.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve to know the truth. Back in 2004, it was Anne McLellan defending her scandal-plagued Liberal government. Now we have another Liberal government plagued by scandal, obstructing the justice committee from learning the truth.

At least previous prime ministers called inquiries when they were faced with scandals. Why is the Liberal Prime Minister refusing to let Canadians learn the truth through a public inquiry?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we have confidence in the committees and their work. We have confidence in the officers of Parliament, like the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner. We respect the work that the justice committee did for five weeks, with hours and hours of testimony. Indeed, we even took the unprecedented step of providing a waiver for solicitor-client privilege and attorney-client privilege so that the former attorney general could speak to the matter before the committee. These are things that we know Canadians need and that is why we provided them.

At the same time, we focus on—

• (1430)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Milton.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister spins an incredible story, and indeed it is incredible, because it is not true.

Let us take the tale of the tape, shall we? Two cabinet ministers have resigned from cabinet. There is one resignation of the best friend, the principal secretary to the Prime Minister, and one early retirement of the Clerk of the Privy Council.

This is extraordinary in normal circumstances and Canadians deserve to know exactly what is going on, but this morning, the Prime Minister has made sure that the justice committee, the only public venue studying this matter, was shut down. What is he afraid of? Why is he covering it up?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we know, clearly members of the justice committee have been studying this issue for over five weeks. We know that they have asked for witnesses to appear to ensure that Canadians can hear from those witnesses, including the former attorney general. We waived solicitor-client privilege as well as cabinet confidence. That is unheard of. It has only happened four times since 1987. The last time under Stephen Harper was a time when he actually did not waive all privileges, because perhaps the Conservatives had something to hide.

That is not our approach. We will focus on Canadians while they focus on tactics.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us just level with Canadians. Something happened after January 14 that terrifies this government. They will go to a great extent to ensure that we never hear about it, but we will.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs indicated that with respect to the concerns of the OECD she was going to assure it by saying that the process was both robust and independent. How can the minister tell us today, after they shut down the justice committee, that this is anything towards robust?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that Canadians know that when it comes to our parliamentary committees, they actually work independently of this place. There are members of Parliament from all parties who sit on committees, including the justice committee. When we had witnesses appearing, we saw that members of other parties were also able to present themselves and ask questions of the witnesses.

It is important that Canadians also know that there is the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner that is also looking into this matter and the independence of the judicial system, because there is an ongoing court case.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former attorney general left cabinet because the Prime Minister's Office was pressuring her to circumvent the law. The former president of the Treasury Board stepped down because she had lost confidence, in her words. Gerald Butts left and we are not sure why, and the Clerk of the Privy Council is retiring. It is odd.

However, the Prime Minister says there was no corruption in the SNC-Lavalin affair. If that is true, then why so many resignations?

Why not allow the former attorney general to tell her whole truth? What is he afraid of?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights did their job. They studied this issue for five weeks. We know that the Office of the Ethics Commissioner is also looking into the matter. We know that this work will be done in several ways.

Nevertheless, the Conservatives do not want to talk about the more than 900,000 jobs that have been created since our government was elected.

Oral Questions

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear her talk about the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. I was in committee over the past five weeks, and I can say that the Liberal members on the other side were controlled by the Prime Minister's Office. There was no way that we could get to the bottom of this matter.

The former attorney general was under a gag order. The other witnesses who testified were able to speak.

Why can we not get the truth about the period from January 14 to February 12?

• (1435)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we have said, we waived solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence so that the former attorney general could share her story and testify before the committee.

I think the member opposite is speaking from experience, since we know that the Leader of the Opposition gives him instructions, but members on this side of the House can make their own choices, and we know that they will continue to do their jobs.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals on the justice committee wrote in a letter last night, "As committee members, we have achieved our objectives with respect to these meetings."

I will say they have. The Liberal objective during this whole scandal has been to cover up for their Prime Minister's corruption. Not only will they not allow the former attorney general to fully tell her story, they are shutting down the entire investigation. What is the Prime Minister so afraid of that he is willing to sink to these depths to cover up his corruption?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the member has a copy of that letter, but does not respect the choice of those members. We also know that when it comes to the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, that office is looking into this matter. We also know that there is an ongoing court case.

What is clear is that the Conservatives are covering up the fact that they do not have a plan. They do not want to talk about the 300,000 children who have been lifted out of poverty. They do not want to talk about the 900,000 jobs that have been created by Canadians since this government came into office, because we invest in Canadians rather than taking the approach of austerity of the Conservatives.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's corrupt actions on the SNC-Lavalin affair have created a Liberal government cesspool of chaos and cover-ups. The former attorney general has resigned. The President of the Treasury Board has resigned. The Clerk of the Privy Council has resigned. The Prime Minister's closest adviser has resigned. Other than that, it is going really well and there is nothing to see here.

Today, the Liberals shut down the investigation. Why are they so afraid of Canadians getting to the truth of this Liberal corruption?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is investigating this matter. We know that there is an ongoing court case.

On this side of the House, we will focus on Canadians. We know that Canadians have created 900,000 jobs since we took government. We know that 300,000 children have been lifted out of poverty. We know that over 800,000 Canadians have been lifted out of poverty. We know there are nine million Canadians whose income tax has gone down since we lowered taxes on middle-class Canadians by increasing them on the wealthiest 1% of Canadians. It is Canadians who sent us here. That is who we focus on.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning the Liberal MPs on the justice committee shut down the study over the PMO's interference scandal for good. Their message was clear. The Liberals do not believe that Canadians deserve to know what happened. Are they serious?

The NDP strongly believes that Canadians deserve the truth. The former attorney general wants to reappear before the committee and speak her full truth. The Prime Minister is refusing to let this happen. The only way we will ever know the truth is through an independent public inquiry. Will the Prime Minister launch one now, yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the justice committee actually spent five weeks looking at this issue. It had witnesses appear throughout those five weeks. Every single meeting where witnesses appeared was in public because Canadians should get to hear. To ensure that Canadians were able to hear, the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege as well as cabinet confidence to ensure that the former attorney general could speak.

Canadians should also know that the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is investigating this matter. They should also know that there is an ongoing court case. We on this side have respect for and confidence in our institutions.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, two senior cabinet ministers, the chief adviser and the most senior public servant in the country have resigned. The Liberals want us to think there is nothing to see here. The Ethics Commissioner's duties are limited and investigating political interference is not part of his job. Now that Liberal MPs have shut down the study of the justice committee, the only choice left is an independent public inquiry. Canadians want the truth. They deserve better than this.

Will the Prime Minister allow an independent public inquiry into the interference scandal at his office, yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the justice committee has looked at this matter. We know that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is investigating this matter. We also know that there is an ongoing court case.

Oral Questions

Let us talk about some numbers. Over 900,000 jobs have been created by Canadians because of investments this government made, 300,000 children have been lifted out of poverty because of the Canada child benefit, nine million Canadians' income taxes went down because we lowered taxes on middle-class Canadians by increasing taxes on the wealthiest 1% of Canadians, and 900,000 seniors are benefiting from the GIS increase. These are all measures that the NDP voted against.

• (1440)

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the foreign affairs minister. Canada's reputation on the world stage is in tatters. It is so bad that the OECD is investigating the Prime Minister's conduct in the SNC-Lavalin matter. The minister promised the OECD that there would be an independent investigation into SNC, but today the minister's Liberal colleagues killed that investigation at the justice committee.

How does that minister feel when the Prime Minister throws her under the bus at the OECD?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the rules-based international order and the multilateral institutions that underpin it are absolutely essential for the pursuit of the Canadian national interest in the world. That is why we are co-operating fully with the OECD in its work on this issue. I have instructed my department and my staff to do so.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister cannot have it both ways. She cannot tell the OECD that the Liberals are co-operating on an independent investigation while her own colleagues are killing the investigation at the justice committee. That minister knows that this type of conduct is more likely in Venezuela or in Russia, not in Canada.

Will this minister remain silent while her Prime Minister and her own colleagues are abusing the rule of law?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as someone who has stood up for the people of Ukraine, as someone who has stood up for the Crimean Tartars, as someone who has stood up for the people of Venezuela, let me say it is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil and the hon. member for Durham will come to order. I have no trouble hearing the question. I should be able to hear the answer equally well.

Order. The hon. opposition House leader will also come to order.

The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs has the floor for a few more seconds.

Hon. Chrystia Freeland: Mr. Speaker, let me say, it is a profound insult to the people living under the Maduro dictatorship, to the people living under Putin's dictatorship, to compare anything happening in—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: There will be one fewer question. Order. The hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton will come to order.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis.

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal scandal has certainly put Canada back in the international limelight. Four resignations in less than three months is a record. The British newspaper *The Guardian* said that the Liberal scandal is like watching a unicorn get run over. The former attorney general says this is a very serious matter and that some questions remain unanswered.

Why muzzle the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights? What is the Prime Minister hiding?

Why try to keep the truth under wraps? Why such arrogance when freedom is at stake?

• (1445)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we waived solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence so the former attorney general could testify before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. The committee members called a number of witnesses, and the witnesses testified. They spent five weeks looking at this issue. The Office of the Conflict of Interest Commissioner is also investigating the matter. We respect their work, and we believe they are capable of doing it.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are hearing nothing but a consistent effort to try to change the channel from this tired, scandal-plagued government. Two Liberal ministers have resigned after losing confidence in the Prime Minister. His top adviser and best friend resigned. Now the Clerk of the Privy Council has resigned. Not surprisingly, the justice committee, led by the PMO, shut down the investigation.

The Prime Minister still denies any wrongdoing, but he has lawyered up and has appointed an ad-scam-era Liberal to convince Canadians to trust him. What is the Prime Minister so desperate to hide?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the justice committee has looked into this matter. The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is investigating this matter. We know that there is an ongoing court case.

I know that the Conservatives are surprised, but we have always focused on Canadians. That is who we are here to serve. Three hundred thousand children have been lifted out of poverty because of the Canada child benefit, tax free, a benefit the Conservatives voted against. Nine hundred thousand jobs have been created by Canadians because of our investments, measures the Conservatives voted against.

It is really unfortunate that the Conservatives do not want to focus on Canadians.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the past six weeks, the Prime Minister has lost his justice minister, his Treasury Board president, his top adviser and the Clerk of the Privy Council. Wow.

Now he is hitting the panic button. He called for help and who answered that call? It was a former Liberal minister, a minister who was in cabinet during the sponsorship scandal, a minister who was in cabinet when SNC-Lavalin was illegally funding the Liberal Party. It was a Liberal who will be doing fundraising for the Liberal Party next week.

Does the Prime Minister take Canadians for fools, yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Ethics Commissioner is looking into the matter and we have confidence in him. We respect his work. We know that the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights also did its job.

I understand that the Conservatives do not want to talk about Canadians, but now the NDP is using the same talking points. Since taking office, Canadians have created over 900,000 jobs, over 300,000 children have been lifted out of poverty, and nine million Canadians' taxes have gone down. The NDP voted against those measures.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, do my colleagues remember the sponsorship scandal?

People in Quebec sure do. It is really quite simple: Everything is hunky-dory for friends of the Liberal Party, and all the rules can be circumvented as long as it is for the Liberal Party. The same thing is happening today.

Desperate to restore the broken trust, the Prime Minister is calling upon a Liberal who was deputy prime minister when Paul Martin was conniving with Gadhafi for his SNC-Lavalin executive friends.

What are the Liberals afraid of? Why do they refuse to hold a public inquiry to—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights are going to look at this case. The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is conducting an investigation. We know we can trust our institutions.

Let us remember that the NDP members used to ask relevant questions for Canadians. We on this side of the House are working for Canadians. We know that they are better off thanks to our programs. Nevertheless, the NDP members continue to vote against measures that help children, that support housing and that help Canadians.

* * *

[English]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, three years ago, recognizing that Atlantic Canada is on the leading edge of

a demographic challenge that will create challenges for economic growth across the entire country, our government announced the Atlantic immigration pilot program. Part of the Atlantic growth strategy, the Atlantic immigration pilot provides the tools and framework employers need to settle talented employees and their families in Atlantic Canada.

Can the minister explain how recent changes to the Atlantic immigration pilot program will continue to strengthen our economic growth?

● (1450)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his strong advocacy for Atlantic Canada. On a recent visit to the region, I saw first-hand how the Atlantic immigration pilot program is literally fuelling economic growth in that part of Canada. That is why, after listening very carefully to Atlantic Canadians, we have extended the Atlantic immigration pilot program by a further two years. That will enable us to allow more international graduates to settle, live in Atlantic Canada and attract more internationally trained nurses to practice in Atlantic Canada.

Unlike the party opposite, on this side of the House—

[Translation]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians do not like corruption. Four people have left the Prime Minister's inner circle since January, and he continues to say that nothing happened. The former attorney general says the opposite, however. She says that this matter is serious and that some questions remain unanswered.

As the saying goes, the longer we wait, the worse things will get. This story reeks of corruption, and Canadians want the truth.

What is the Prime Minister hiding? What is he so afraid of?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is investigating this matter. We know that he can do this work, and he must be allowed to do it.

The Conservatives do not want to hear the budget speech and debate it. Today is budget day.

We know that our plan is working for Canadians. The Conservatives must know that Canadians are waiting for their plan, but the Conservatives clearly do not have one. They want to play petty politics instead of talking about measures that help Canadians.

Oral Questions

[English]

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former Treasury Board president said that she had lost confidence in the government when she resigned. I can relate to that.

The Liberals dismissed her resignation, claiming there was still nothing to see, but I know she would not have resigned over nothing.

The Prime Minister has sacrificed the rule of law and attacked our democracy. Canadians need the whole truth, not just what he wants us to hear. What is the Prime Minister so afraid of? What is the Prime Minister so desperate to hide?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since 1987, there have been four occasions when cabinet confidence was lifted. This Prime Minister not only waived cabinet confidence, this Prime Minister also waived solicitor-client privilege. Solicitor-client privilege actually is a factor for attorneys general. During the time she was the former attorney general, that privilege was lifted so that Canadians could hear.

We on this side will focus on Canadians while the Conservatives play politics.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that SNC-Lavalin bought a \$38-million yacht for the son of Moammar Gadhafi in exchange for contracts.

I want to go back to this issue with the OECD. The foreign affairs minister watched two of her colleagues resign on principle to stand against the Prime Minister and his role in this greasy scandal. Why is she letting herself be used on the international stage for this abrogation of Canadian democracy?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely proud to speak for Canada, to speak for our amazing country on the international stage.

Because I was not fully heard when the member for Durham posed his astonishing question, let me just say that it is both insulting and absurd to the people of Canada, as well as to the people suffering from the dictatorships of Maduro and Putin, to make any comparison between the two.

• (1455)

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is insulting and absurd is that the government stands up day after day and gives cover for insulting Canadian democratic institutions for a company that bought prostitutes for Moammar Gadhafi's son. Every single one of the ministers who stands up, the justice committee today, the Liberal members who gave the Prime Minister cover, should be ashamed of themselves.

The foreign affairs minister, of all the women in this caucus who stand on behalf of Canada, should get this right. Why is she giving the Prime Minister cover?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the member has spoken about women and foreign affairs, let me talk about what our government is doing to advance the rights of women in the world. Let me talk about what we are doing to stand up for women's rights activists in Saudi Arabia. Let me talk about what we are doing to stand up for reproductive health

and access to reproductive health services for all the women in Canada and the world.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it was just a few days ago that the Prime Minister's Office promised the anti-bribery unit of the OECD that the Liberals would hold "robust" hearings into the allegations of the former attorney general, and today they shut those hearings down to keep the former attorney general from speaking.

To change the channel, the Prime Minister is bringing back Sheila Copps' old seatmate from the sponsorship scandal, Anne McLellan, who is presently raising money for the Liberal Party.

They cannot appoint someone who is raising cash for the Liberals to reassure Canadians that Liberals are not breaking the law. Does the Prime Minister not understand this? Who is giving him advice these days?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these are definitely tactics and approaches I expect from the Conservatives, but the NDP definitely should undertake to return to what they used to fight for. We are going to fight for Canadians. We are going to fight for jobs, and we know that our plan is working.

When it comes to the member's question, the hon. Anne McLellan has supported and encouraged women to run as candidates across all political parties for a really long time. We know that we need more women to run for office, and the member also knows that the hon. Anne McLellan will not be at that fundraiser now that she has accepted this role.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, she cancelled the fundraiser, *mon dieu*. How can we come from sunny ways to these *Gong Show* days?

The Prime Minister promised to be an ethical alternative to the backroom control of Stephen Harper and the cronyism of Jean Chrétien, and he has proven to be the worst of both. He is burning through his credibility here by trying to shut down the investigation into SNC.

Let me put it simply. This is about leadership. This is about integrity. This is about the rule of law. Does the Prime Minister not understand that or does he just not care?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that question and the preamble prior to it was entirely misleading. The Hon. Anne McLellan was attending an event and she will no longer be attending that event now that she has taken on—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, the hon. member for Carleton and others will come to order. We need to hear both the questions and the answers. Let us show a little respect for each other and for this place.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Calgary Signal Hill will come to order.

The hon. member for Carleton.

Oral Questions

● (1500)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the deputy leader of the Conservatives asked the former attorney general, “can you tell us what you discussed with the Prime Minister at your meetings in Vancouver on February 11?” The answer was, “I cannot.” The next question asked, “Can you tell us what was discussed with the cabinet on February 19?” The answer was, “I cannot.”

What happened in those meetings that was so egregious and disgraceful that the Prime Minister feels he has to cover it all up?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the justice committee has looked into this matter. The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is investigating this matter. There is an ongoing court case.

When it comes to the two dates that the member is asking about, the former attorney general was not the attorney general on those dates.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly how they justified banning her from speaking about the events that she witnessed during that time, and we know those events must have been egregious, so egregious that she felt she had to resign. However, when the deputy Conservative leader asked, “Can you tell us why you've resigned”, the answer was, “I cannot.”

We simply asked for her to come back and finish the rest of the story. Today, we had a motion to do that, but the Prime Minister shut down the justice committee investigation.

What is so egregious and ugly that the Prime Minister needed to cover it all up?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the matter before the justice committee was with regard to her time as Attorney General, so the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege for her time as Attorney General. The Prime Minister waived cabinet confidence for her time as the Attorney General. That is exactly what took place.

The member basically is on a fishing trip. The member can choose to play their politics of division, as it is what the Conservatives do, but we will focus on Canadians. We are going to focus on 300,000 children that have been lifted out of poverty. We are hoping that even more are with our plan.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when The Globe and Mail first reported about this scandal, the Prime Minister said that it was all a lie and he said that the proof was that his former attorney general was still in cabinet. Well, the next day she resigned. Then he said that he was disappointed in her, that was just her problem. Then his Treasury Board president resigned. He said that was just the two of them. However, then the head of the entire public service resigned.

What is going on behind the scenes, which is so egregious that everyone has to resign, that the Prime Minister is covering up today?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the justice committee looked at this matter. We believe that Canadians should get to hear from witnesses and that is exactly why the Prime Minister waived

solicitor-client privilege for her time as Attorney General. That is exactly why the Prime Minister waived cabinet confidence for her time as Attorney General. The matter that was in front of the justice committee was with regard to her time as Attorney General, because Canadians should get to hear.

The Prime Minister actually also addressed the nation and answered questions from the media, because he recognized that we could always improve on our institutions. That is the leadership he has demonstrated and that is the work we will continue to do.

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INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Kildonan—St. Paul, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Indian day school system is a dark and shameful chapter in Canadian history. What many Canadians do not know is that since 1920, over 200,000 indigenous children were forced to attend these schools. Many of them were mistreated, abused and robbed of their cultural identity.

Last week the proposed settlement agreement was announced with some of the survivors of the Indian day school. Could the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations update the House on what this proposed settlement means for the survivors, their families and communities?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Kildonan—St. Paul for her commitment to reconciliation.

I was honoured to announce the proposed settlement agreement with the McLean class action members. As well as compensation, the proposed settlement includes a \$200-million legacy fund in memory of the late Garry McLean to support wellness, healing, education, culture and commemoration.

Nothing can undo the harms of the past, but this will bring us one step closer to lasting and meaningful resolution for survivors and their communities.

* * *

● (1505)

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former attorney general wants to speak because this is a serious matter and certain questions remain unanswered. However, the supposedly independent Liberal members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, have, at the Prime Minister's behest, been playing games to prevent the former attorney general from speaking.

Canadians who want answers will have to settle for a sham investigation by the person who was the Liberal deputy prime minister under Paul Martin. What a joke.

What are the Liberals trying to hide from Canadians?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights have done their job. The Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence for the period during which the attorney general was in office. That is what the committee studied, and that is exactly why the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence.

The Conservatives clearly do not want to talk about the 300,000 children who have been lifted out of poverty. They do not want to talk about the—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when Liberal cronies want to have legislation passed discreetly, or get special meetings, or have the Attorney General pressured into changing her mind, all they have to do is ask.

In the meantime, our dairy farmers and the regions in Quebec get nothing. What is more, our food sovereignty was sacrificed in the last three trade agreements signed by the Liberal government.

Why do the Liberals spend all their time working to further their own interests instead of working for our dairy farmers and the regions of Quebec?

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government stood firm on supply management against the Americans, who wanted to dismantle it.

We are currently working with egg and poultry producers and processors to find the best way to support them fully and equitably in order to ensure that they will be able to innovate, prosper and be ready for future generations.

We will continue to support the supply management system, our producers and processors, and rural communities.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone knows how committed I am to the environment and water quality.

Our drinking water and waste-water systems are vital to the health and sustainability of our communities. Our government is making investments across Quebec to ensure that municipalities get the funding they need and have systems that are in a good state of repair.

Can the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities inform the House of our government's most recent investments in the water systems of Quebec's municipalities?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking the member for Brome—Missisquoi for his question and his excellent work.

I was in Bécancour recently to announce a joint investment of \$4.6 million with the province to replace the current waste-water treatment system and build a new pumping station in Sainte-Eulalie.

We are making essential investments throughout Quebec and Canada to build greener, more sustainable communities and to prepare them for future growth. We have ambitions for our regions and we will continue to make investments to improve the quality of life of Canadians across the country.

* * *

[*English*]

JUSTICE

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in about one hour the Liberals are going to try to flip the switch on this scandal, but there is no way to overstate how the level of corruption and the state of the cover-up caused by the actions of the Prime Minister and his office have created a crisis of confidence.

This morning that crisis of confidence in the ability for the institution of Parliament to do its job peaked when the Liberals shut down the committee. Clearly, the former attorney general has more to say and wants to, but the Prime Minister is controlling her by not letting her speak again.

What is the Prime Minister so afraid of? What is he desperately trying to cover up?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, finally a question on the budget. The Conservatives said the word “budget” on budget day.

We are hoping that today's budget will get to continue to build on the plan we have been fighting for to make sure that Canadians are better off today than when we took office three and a half years ago.

Three hundred thousand children have been lifted out of poverty because of the Canada child benefit, a tax-free measure that helps families with children that need it the most. Canadians created 900,000 jobs because of our investments. Today small businesses have the lowest small business tax rate at 9%. These are all measures that the Conservatives voted against.

* * *

● (1510)

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government does not respect francophones, as evidenced by how our armed forces treat them. Specialized career development courses, particularly in intelligence and special forces, are available in English only.

If francophone service members want to be promoted and specialize, they have to abandon French and automatically use English in many cases.

Government Orders

When will the government provide equal opportunities for francophone service members by offering and guaranteeing training in French—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie.

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer my colleague's question about the fair treatment of francophones in our armed forces.

I remind the member that we reinvested in Royal Military College Saint-Jean to finally give our service members access to university training, which was not available under the former Conservative government.

Once again, we are showing leadership on the French fact in Canada, and unlike the former Conservative government, we will always be here to protect the French fact and francophones.

Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will remind the minister that it was her government that closed Royal Military College Saint-Jean.

This government does not respect francophones, as evidenced by how the RCMP treats them.

In the past five years, the RCMP has not promoted a single unilingual francophone member.

Why does the government allow Quebec and Canadian francophones to be treated like second-class citizens in the RCMP and in our armed forces? When will it provide equal opportunities to everyone, no matter what language they speak?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is in no position to teach us anything about protecting Canada's francophones.

If my colleague has concerns about the state of bilingualism in our federal institutions, I invite him to participate in our consultations on the modernization of the Official Languages Act.

We recognize that we must always protect institutional bilingualism and the rights of francophones across the country. It was a Trudeau government that passed the first Official Languages Act in 1969, and it is another government with the same name that will have the opportunity to do even more and modernize it.

* * *

[English]

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

His apology for abuse suffered 70 years ago by Inuit TB patients was appreciated.

Today the rate of TB among Inuit is 290 times that of non-indigenous Canadians, and we know why. A severe shortage of housing creates overcrowding and that is a major cause of TB in Nunavut.

Previously announced funding, although sounding good, does not even provide for two houses per community per year. Will he commit to action today and provide adequate funding to alleviate this severe housing crisis and make a real difference?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to working with our partners specifically to address tuberculosis among indigenous populations and particularly in the north. We are working with indigenous partners and governments, provincial and territorial, in supporting innovative and community-led approaches.

We are working with partners to eliminate tuberculosis across Inuit Nunangat by 2030 and reduce active tuberculosis by at least 50% by 2025. We will continue to work with our indigenous partners to address that rate of tuberculosis in a distinction-based and a culturally safe way, which will most definitely include housing.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1515)

[English]

AN ACT RESPECTING FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-92, An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo has four minutes coming to her, and then we will go to questions.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always a bit of a challenge to do 16 minutes and then four minutes. I think it would be best to use my last four minutes to do a bit of a summary in terms of what my comments were prior to question period.

First of all, I think we in this House all need to recognize the tragedy of too many children in care, the disproportionate number of indigenous children in care, and how government policies of the past have impacted what is happening today.

We have also talked about how there has been a bit of an evolution, hopefully in a positive way, not just in what the government has done but also in what our former Conservative government had done previously in terms of more partnership and an increased focus on prevention. That said, we still have a way to go.

We perceive that the legislation, if it has been crafted correctly, can put an end to some of the blurriness around jurisdictions, because that has been a challenge for as long as I can remember, especially on reserves. Putting an end to that, and being very clear about it, and affirming indigenous rights in that area are important.

As well, focusing on prevention is important. Many of us, especially those of us with a health care background, know that prevention is absolutely key.

Government Orders

That takes us to the actual crafting of the legislation. There are some elements that are strong. However, there is a very important question that we need to make sure we have an answer for.

In terms of indigenous communities on reserve, I think the clarity is good. Also, how indigenous communities will be providing services to their members where they have gone down jurisdiction and off reserve is very good.

However, I am not a legal expert. The government always talks about having to make sure we are complying with the Constitution and aligning with the Constitution. When the province is providing services off reserve, we need to be very clearly staying within the constitutional jurisdiction of the federal government.

I do find it interesting that the Liberals used to criticize us regularly if they felt we were not compliant with the Constitution, not compliant with the Charter. The Liberals accused us of having a top-down approach.

However, I would suggest that the answers that the minister gave to me regarding the response of the provinces were a bit of a concern. I am not sure that we do not have a constitutional issue that we might need to remedy within this legislation.

I look forward to questions and answers. The bottom line is that there are some really good principles here, but the government has a very poor record in terms of turning principles into legislation. I only need to look at Bill S-3, which was a terrible mess. I only need to look at the indigenous languages bill, for which the government tabled 30 corrections, which is unheard of, late at the clause-by-clause stage. As a result, I am not totally confident that the government has been able to craft this legislation in a good way, but we will be giving it all due diligence because the principles are very important.

• (1520)

Mr. Dan Vandal (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must say I am cautiously optimistic about the potential support from official opposition members for this legislation.

I am glad the member mentioned the co-development process. As the member perhaps mentioned in her speech, this bill has been in the works for approximately a year. There have been unprecedented consultations with the indigenous community. I believe there were upwards of 70 meetings with thousands of individuals who were consulted on the legislation. In fact, Senator Murray Sinclair, former chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has said that the consultations that were done for Bill C-92 are a model for implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action in a meaningful and direct way.

That encourages me, as do the comments that were made. I am wondering if the member could comment on the importance of the consultation for this bill.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, when we have heard the government proclaim in the past that it consulted properly, it has turned out to be an absolute mess. I look at Bill S-3 as an example. We can also look at the Trans Mountain pipeline. In this case, the Liberal government claimed that it would do a better job than the Conservatives had done and that it was going to do that job properly,

and what happened? There was a court decision, and the Liberal government absolutely blew it.

Again, I will wait to hear what is said by the many groups at committee as they bring their expertise to the table and tell us what was done properly and what was done improperly. Forgive me if I do not have full confidence that the Liberals have actually done what they said they would do. It is because I have looked at their history in this Parliament in terms of their government's legislative and consultative process.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague. I have worked with her on a number of these files and I have enormous respect for her.

My concern is that when I speak with indigenous communities, I hear that the Canadian government has not earned their trust in order to deal with a progressive response to the long-standing policy of destroying indigenous families. With the Liberal government, it comes down to the continual refusal, except through court battles, to actually fund services properly. The Liberal government was found guilty of chronic institutional underfunding of child welfare by the Human Rights Tribunal, yet it spent over \$1 million continuing to fight compliance order after compliance order while children were dying, and in each of the compliance orders, the tribunal found that the Government of Canada was always putting the short-term financial interests of the department ahead of the needs of children.

The government does not seem to want to legislate the Jordan's principle obligation and it does not want to legislate its obligation to ensure statutory funding, so how can indigenous communities expect that they are going to see any different result this time around from the nice words of the Canadian government?

• (1525)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I also want to acknowledge the hard work and the fierce advocacy my colleague has given at all times since I have known him here in this House.

Sometimes the words the government uses are good. I have used the example before, but it is so perfect I want to use it again: The government has this great bedside manner and says all the right things, but when it actually comes to being the surgeon, the government is the last person one wants doing the surgery because it cannot execute. It is very good at saying things that make people feel good and that encourage them, but when it comes to the execution, it has been disappointment after disappointment.

Another example is the murdered and missing indigenous women inquiry, which seems to have stumbled and fumbled along. Hopefully something good will come out of it when the report is finally released.

There have been so many areas where, in spite of the good words, there has been stumble after stumble.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo for her consistent and compassionate work on this file.

Government Orders

I have two questions in relation to this bill. The first is about priorities. She alluded to her concern about the execution of the Liberals' very good early rhetoric on reconciliation with very little follow-through. I would like her thoughts on all of these pieces of legislation being quickly tabled in the final months of government, which speaks a lot to priorities.

The second question would be about jurisdiction. It appears that the government has some constitutional issues related to the division of powers between the federal government and the provinces, and clearly does not have a prolonged approach to working with provinces on child services in areas that clearly are within their jurisdiction constitutionally.

Could she speak to those two issues?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, those are two absolutely critical areas that have been identified.

The government promised that this legislation would be introduced in January. I remember a press conference in December over a year ago, but we actually did not see the bill until the end of February. As I said, the Liberals' lack of planning and getting it done does not constitute an emergency on our part. This is important legislation. They failed to get it to the table in a timely way. We will do what is appropriate, with good due diligence.

On the other areas, I specifically asked the minister if he had a statement regarding the legislation's charter and constitutional compliance. He did not acknowledge that one way or the other. I also asked if there were any problems. Had he talked to the provinces? He said something about wanting the provinces to get on board. We cannot just brush away that issue. Especially as it relates to services that have not been drawn down by first nations institutions and where services are delivered off reserve by the provinces, we have an issue we need to understand, and we need to make sure that we get it right.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo. Her riding is next to mine. We share borders, and we also share overlapping territories with the indigenous people in the area. I certainly know how well she has worked with the people of the Tk'emlúps nation and the people around the riding, indigenous and non-indigenous.

The member has pointed out a number of things. We did not get a chance to discuss the legislation at caucus. The Liberals dropped it last Thursday, before we went on a constituency two-week stretch, so we have not had a chance to discuss it.

She also brought up some serious issues with draft legislation or legislation we have seen brought to the House by the government. I turn to Bill C-69. I believe that there were over 300 amendments presented by the governing party. The party that drafted the bill had to submit 300 amendments to Bill C-69.

The member mentioned the amendments to the indigenous languages bill, amendments from the government that drafted the legislation in the first place. They just cannot seem to get it right.

I would like to ask the member if she has questions about this bill or if she would like to have a little more time to actually look at it before endorsing it or not.

• (1530)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I hope that in their haste to move it through the system, they make sure that we have the opportunity to do our due diligence. As I indicated, with Bill S-3, we were reassured that it was going to fix the court-imposed decision. It was going to fix the issue that had been identified. However, it took only the first two or three witnesses before we saw that this would not fix the problem.

Again, we have an important piece of legislation in terms of what it needs to accomplish and what we should try to accomplish. Have they actually accomplished it? We will need to see.

Child and family services in the area we represent in terms of shared territory is a group that is doing a really good job, both on and off reserve. They have a partnership. They have been moving along. I see this legislation perhaps giving them the next nudge in terms of what they are doing and where they are going. However, we need to hear not just from chiefs and national organizations but from people on the ground who are delivering services to make sure that the bill would do what we want it to do.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is a great honour to rise and speak on behalf of the people of Timmins—James Bay, particularly today, a historic day, when we are dealing with the need to reform the badly broken child welfare system and Bill C-92, an act respecting first nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families.

I will say at the outset that we have waited a long time for this legislation. However, it has to be done right, because Canada has not earned the trust to have the right to make decisions about indigenous children. If we are going to move forward, we need to see a firm legislative commitment from the government that it will live up to its obligations, because we are talking about the lives of children.

I want to begin by mentioning some of these children who have died in the last two years. Tammy Keeash was taken from her home, where she was poor and indigenous, by a state that said it would keep her safe. She was found dead in the McIntyre Floodway in Thunder Bay. She was 14 years old. There was Chantel Fox; Kanina Sue Turtle; Jolynn Winter; Jenera Roundsky; Azraya Kokopenace; Courtney Scott, from Fort Albany; and Tina Fontaine.

I have met the Kokopenace family in Grassy Narrows. It is a family that has been poisoned by the corporate crimes in Grassy Narrows, where 80% of the children are suffering from contamination and poison. Little Azraya was taken from her family to be made safe, and she was found dead on the streets of Kenora.

Courtney Scott was taken from Fort Albany and died thousands of kilometres from home. I heard her younger sister speak. What she said of the treatment of indigenous children today, in 2019, in the child welfare system, will shock Canadians. They have to understand that what happened with the abuse in the residential schools is going on today.

Government Orders

Our nation has been very moved by the story of Chanie Wenjack. We all thought how amazing was this moment of Canada coming together to hear the story of that little boy trying to get home to Marten Falls. However, there are 165,000 children like Chanie Wenjack who are trying to find their way home.

If we do one thing in this Parliament, we are going to make sure that the legislation is done right. We are not going to do what has been done year in, year out, decade after decade, which is nice words, positive talk and all the oversight from the Auditor General, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and all the great committees that have looked into the abuse and neglect of indigenous children. Children are still dying to this day and are continuing to die.

We will begin by talking about Tina Fontaine. I urge my colleagues to read the report on how the system failed little Tina. She was taken from her home by the white state. People promised that they would keep her safe. They put her up in a hotel and left her on the streets of Manitoba. The Manitoba government does not even track the number of children they leave in hotels. In her final days, when she was listed as a missing person, she had contact with paramedics, police and child welfare services, and not one of them came to her aid, even though it was known that she was being preyed upon by a 62-year-old meth addict. When she tried to get help, she was told to ride her bike to a shelter.

It was the state's obligation to protect this child, and she was found murdered in the Red River. I always think of the powerful words of Sergeant O'Donovan, who found her body. He said that if it had been a litter of puppies, Canadians would be outraged. However, it was just another little indigenous girl.

This is what we here today to talk about fixing. There are many elements in this bill that I think are very reassuring in terms of the language of indigenous control of indigenous communities. The right of indigenous families and communities to decide the future of their own children has to be the beginning of the end of colonialism, because colonialism was constructed on the destruction of the Indian family.

• (1535)

However, unless we see the legislative elements that actually force the federal government to live up to its obligations, we will not be all that much further ahead, because Canada as a nation has used great and beautiful words for a long time and has failed indigenous children. It has simply not earned the right to be trusted on this.

This bill today comes to us after five non-compliance orders by a human rights tribunal that has forced the government into compliance with its legal obligations. The previous government spent nearly \$6 million fighting Cindy Blackstock.

Michael Wernick, who is now retired, was the deputy minister who was involved in spying on Cindy Blackstock, because the government saw a woman who was speaking up for children as a threat to the Government of Canada.

It did not start today and it did not start with the current government or the previous government or the government before that. It goes all the way back to the decision that was made in the taking of the land and the breaking of the treaties. The fundamental principle was to take the Indian children away from their families

and to destroy who they were as a people, which meets one of the key international tests of genocide.

Duncan Campbell Scott did not invent the residential school system, but he certainly perfected it. When he was faced with the appalling deaths of children in the residential schools from the chronic, systemic, deliberate underfunding by the federal government, he said:

It is readily acknowledged that Indian Children lose their natural resistance to illness by habituating so closely in the residential schools and that they die at a much higher rate than in their villages. But this does not justify a change in the policy of this department which is geared toward a final solution of our Indian problem.

The term "final solution" was a homemade Canadian concept, and it was based on the destruction of the Indian people.

Why do we have to talk about history? It is one thing I have learned as a white guy. People say, "Why are we always talking about what happened back then?" We cannot go into any indigenous community without knowing how we got here. If we do not know how we got here, we do not know how we are going to go forward. It was the residential schools.

By the 1950s, the federal government realized that residential schools had been an abject failure, not for the abuse, the torture and the rape of the children, and not for the horrific low results of education. The government decided that it was a failure because it failed in its fundamental job of assimilation, so it decided to use the child welfare system. There was nothing accidental about the sixties scoop. The sixties scoop was a deliberate federal policy to take children far way from their identity and to basically turn them into white children.

In the book on residential schools by John Milloy, he writes:

Fostering was seen as a most effective method of breaking through the welfare bottleneck and ultimately, in tandem with integration, of closing [the residential] schools.... It had...the added allure of financial reward.... Children in foster homes could "be cared for less expensively since the maintenance costs are on the average less than for residential school placement"....

This was always the principle. It was about the destruction of identity while saving the taxpayers money. That is the fundamental principle that has led to the chronic underfunding of indigenous schools. It is the principle that has led to so much suffering and suicide in my own region, where we have had over 600 suicide deaths, almost entirely of youth, since the 1980s.

Governments in and governments out make all kinds of promises, but nothing changes. This was the fundamental principle Cindy Blackstock started to fight over 12 years ago with the federal government, that there was not anything accidental about what was happening in the child welfare system; it was a deliberate federal government policy of chronic underfunding by up to 40%.

Government Orders

At a certain point in the 1970s and 1980s, the government began to talk about indigenous control of child welfare, but the indigenous people were only allowed to control a broken, underfunded system. It is ironic that one of the only times the department of Indian affairs will agree to spend more money on children is when they are being taken from their families. That has been the policy. The sixties scoop has been called the millennial scoop. It is the 2018 and the 2019 scoop. There are more children in the control of the state now than there were at the height of the residential schools. The policies are still there.

• (1540)

When I see Bill C-92 and I hear talk about how we are going to move towards indigenous control and the indigenous right to develop their own family structures that are protected, where children are put into safe and culturally appropriate environments, I feel that is a great moment. However, if we do not see the legal statutory obligation of the federal government to close the funding gap, it is just a carry-on.

The ruling that the federal government was found guilty of systemic human rights abuse against indigenous children, in 2016, was a landmark moment, and I was very proud when the Prime Minister said that the government would not fight that ruling, but he did fight that ruling.

He fought that ruling to the tune of \$1 million. He fought it through five non-compliance orders and each time the Human Rights Tribunal found that the federal government was choosing its own financial interests over the interests of children. In the third non-compliance order, the tribunal found “the definition of Jordan’s Principle adopted by Canada was a calculated, analyzed and informed policy choice based on financial impacts and potential risks rather than on the needs or the best interests of First Nations children, which Jordan’s Principle is meant to protect and should be the goal of Canada’s programming”.

In that third non-compliance order the tribunal found Canada culpable in the deaths of Jenna Roundsky, Chantel Fox and Jolynn Winter because it knew that these children in Wapekeka were at risk. There was a suicide cluster and the government opted not to help those children because it said the funding request came at an awkward time. The government insisted that the lives of those children had to fit within the priorities of the Department of Indian Affairs, not that the Department of Indian Affairs was obligated to those children.

The Human Rights Tribunal found the government culpable in the deaths of these children. These were beautiful young children and they were loved. The failure of the government to respond in Wapekeka kicked off a horrific suicide crisis and we are still picking up the pieces.

I was in Thunder Bay with my good friend Sol Mamakwa, where we met with the family of a young suicide victim. How do we talk to a family in a community that has lost so many children? That child was taken from her family by the policies of this state and the Liberal government because it will not fund high schools in her community, so she was living in a boarding house at age 14 in Thunder Bay.

These are the ongoing deaths and suffering and abuse that result from this underfunding.

The fourth Human Rights Tribunal ruling found Canada’s continued reliance on the incremental approach to equality fosters the same discrimination that spurred the initial complaint.

When Parliament ordered the Liberal government to end the shortfall in child welfare of \$158 million, the government said if it was forced to spend that money it would be like throwing confetti around. The government had been found guilty of systemic underfunding, but it felt that if it was forced to end the systemic underfunding it would be a waste of money. The Liberals tell us that incremental change is the path forward and that things take time.

I think of Dr. Martin Luther King’s incredible statement from a Birmingham jail that asked how we tell people who have been denied rights for 100 and some years to wait and change will come one day. The change has to come today.

Quite simply, we have to start from the principle that Canada has not earned and Canada has never had the credibility or the right to be trusted with the lives of indigenous children.

If the government comes forward with a recognition of its culpability, a recognition of humility, a recognition that we begin the transformation of our fundamental relationship by saying that the future lies with the children, that the rights of the children will be protected, that the basic family units and the cultural units of indigenous communities will no longer be targeted and undermined and destroyed through the chronic systems of the broken child welfare system, the broken education system and the failed housing system and mould crisis, that the lives of children will become the most valuable thing that we cherish in this country, we will be the nation we were meant to be.

• (1545)

When I look at this legislation I see good language, but we need to have it written into law. Jordan’s principle has to be written into law because it was the government’s continued interpretation of Jordan’s principle that was found discriminatory. The statutory obligations to equity have to be written into law because the government cannot be trusted.

When I hear the indigenous services minister say that the government will sign the agreements band by band, nation by nation, community by community, and to trust him, there is no reason to trust. I respect the new indigenous services minister but in my many years here I have seen good Indian affairs ministers, I have seen bad Indian affairs ministers, I have seen lazy Indian affairs ministers and I have seen racist Indian affairs ministers.

The only thing I ever saw change in those 15 years was the concerted, unrelenting legal pressure to force the department to live up to its obligations. Whether we have a good Indian affairs minister or a bad one or an indifferent one, it does not make a difference. These are the legislative responsibilities.

Government Orders

What is it that we want out of this? We want to have clearly written into law the obligations of the federal government to recognize the jurisdiction of indigenous nations and organizations, and we support that. We want it written into law that they will respect and clarify what the best interests of the child are so that it is not vague, so that we will have strong national standards for ensuring equitable treatment with equitable funding. Without equitable funding we cannot move forward.

We want accountability measures for Canada that hold the government to account. We can see what has happened in Manitoba with the Tina Fontaine ruling, where the Conservative government said that with the Tina Fontaine tragedy there were no lessons to be learned. It is a travesty when so many children are on the streets of Winnipeg because of the broken system in Manitoba. In Ontario, the Doug Ford government cancelled the child advocate's office, the one voice for the most marginalized children, speaking up for children who had been sexually or physically abused, children who had died in the system. If we do not have those mechanisms to protect children, the system will continue to destroy lives and we will continue to see the loss of children.

We want to work with the government. We want to do whatever it takes to move the legislation forward but we will not go along with just more words, not after the deaths of so many, not after the Human Rights Tribunal, not after the work of young Cree leaders like Shannen Koostachin, who called out the government for its systemic failure to support the children.

We have to put the lives and the rights of children as a top priority. I have to say that it is going to cost a lot of money to meet those 150 years of broken promises, but I can tell colleagues that there is not a single greater investment that can be made in this nation than in the lives of the indigenous children who are on the reserves, on the streets and in the communities across our country. This is a young generation who are not sitting back, a young generation who are not going to be told what to do, a young generation that understands that hope is made real when it is given the opportunity to make change.

That is when reconciliation will be made real. Without that commitment by the federal government we are just continuing the long broken pattern.

I call on my colleagues in the government. We will do whatever it takes on our side to move this legislation through. However, this legislation has to work in the interests of children because Canada has not earned the right to be trusted with the rights and the lives of indigenous children.

* * *

• (1550)

WAYS AND MEANS

NOTICE OF MOTION

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table, in both official languages, the budget documents for 2019, including the notices of ways and means motions. The details of the measures are included in these documents and I am requesting that an order of the day be designated for consideration of these motions.

I would also like to say that the lock-ups relating to the budget will be released at 4 p.m., once markets have closed, but we will be providing MPs with copies of the budget at this time. I know that members will be judicious with their privileges before 4 p.m.

* * *

AN ACT RESPECTING FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-92, an act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to begin with, I admire the hon. member's commitment and his ability to hold the government's feet to the fire on this issue. He said many times that Canada has not earned the respect of indigenous peoples relative to indigenous issues. I agree with him 100%.

However, I am proud to say that we have made progress. Since we have been elected, 650,000 service requests by children for Jordan's principle have been approved. We need to do better than that. Not one request has provided service to Métis children.

The government has doubled its support for indigenous child welfare. We now spend close to \$1.2 billion per year on indigenous child welfare. We need to do better. Not one dollar goes to Métis child welfare or Inuit child welfare.

We have been working on the legislation for well over a year. We have consulted. There have been over 70 meetings with thousands of indigenous citizens, leaders and non-leaders. Could the hon. member comment about the co-development process and the importance of getting this right, of consulting with those at the grassroots level and of consulting with the leadership? How important is that for this legislation?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I have enjoyed working with my hon. colleague on this file.

He mentioned how many children have been helped by Jordan's principle. This is proof of the effect of the legal challenge, because the government was not going to spend a dime. On the day the Jordan's principle ruling came down, the government was spending \$100,000 to fight a child's getting 6,000 dollars' worth of dental work. That had to stop after the third non-compliance order. The third non-compliance order forced the government to start meeting its legal obligations, and since then, things have transformed enormously.

The same is true for the underfunding of child welfare. I congratulate my colleague on the money that is going into this, but this was a direct result of the Human Rights Tribunal ruling, which noted that underfunding had to stop and it had to stop now. We are here because of the legal battles. Going forward, we need to ensure that those legal battles become the precedent.

Routine Proceedings

With respect to the issue of consultation, it is crucial that we consult. It is crucial that we get this right, because across this nation there are many different ways this could roll out. We have to be respectful. The problem is that we have a very short timeline, so I want to work with my colleague on this. I am hoping that we will get the maximum amount of response from the government and it will be willing to work with the legitimate concerns that will be brought forward.

• (1555)

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, for some reason, the budget document is being distributed long before the budget is supposed to be out.

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance tabled the budget documents a few minutes ago.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

The House resumed from March 18 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: It being 3:55 p.m., pursuant to an order made on Monday, March 18, 2019, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the instruction to the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans concerning the consideration of Bill S-203.

Call in the members.

• (1635)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 1007*)

YEAS

Members

Aboultatif	Albas
Albrecht	Alleslev
Anderson	Arnold
Barlow	Barrett
Benzen	Bergen
Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis)	Block
Boucher	Brassard
Calkins	Carrie
Chong	Clarke
Cooper	Davidson
Diotte	Doherty
Dreeshen	Eglinski
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)
Fast	Finley
Gallant	Généreux
Genuis	Gladu
Gourde	Harder
Hoback	Jeneroux
Kelly	Kent
Kitchen	Kmiec
Kusie	Lake
Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Leitch
Liepert	Lloyd
Lukiwski	MacKenzie
Maguire	McCauley (Edmonton West)
McColeman	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)	Motz

Nater
Nuttall
O'Toole
Raitt
Richards
Scheer
Shields
Sopuck
Stanton
Stubbs
Trost
Vecchio
Wagantall
Warkentin
Wong
Zimmer — 85

Nicholson
Obhrai
Poilievre
Reid
Saroya
Schmale
Shipley
Sorenson
Strahl
Sweet
Van Kesteren
Viersen
Warawa
Webber
Yurdiga

NAYS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Amos	Anandasangaree
Angus	Arseneault
Arya	Aubin
Ayoub	Badawey
Bagnell	Bains
Barsalou-Duval	Baylis
Beaulieu	Beech
Bendayan	Bennett
Benson	Bernier
Bittle	Blaikie
Blair	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Boissonnault	Bossio
Boudrias	Boulerice
Boutin-Sweet	Bratina
Breton	Brosseau
Caesar-Chavannes	Cannings
Caron	Carr
Casey (Cumberland—Colchester)	Casey (Charlottetown)
Chagger	Champagne
Chen	Choquette
Christopherson	Clement
Cormier	Cullen
Cuzner	Dabrusin
Damoff	Davies
DeCoursey	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Donnelly
Drouin	Dubé
Dubourg	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Dusseault	Duvall
Dzerowicz	Easter
Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Ellis	Eyking
Eyolfson	Fergus
Fillmore	Finnigan
Fisher	Fonseca
Fortier	Fortin
Fragiskatos	Fraser (West Nova)
Fraser (Central Nova)	Freeland
Fry	Fuhr
Gameau	Garrison
Gerretsen	Gill
Goldsmith-Jones	Goodale
Gould	Graham
Grewal	Hajdu
Hardcastle	Hardie
Harvey	Hébert
Hehr	Hogg
Holland	Housefather
Hughes	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Johns	Jolibois
Joly	Jones
Jordan	Julian
Kang	Khalid
Khera	Kwan
Lambropoulos	Lametti
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)	Laverdière
LeBlanc	Lebouthillier
Lefebvre	Levitt
Lightbound	Lockhart

Routine Proceedings

Long	Longfield
Ludwig	MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacGregor	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney	Masse (Windsor West)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)	
Mathysse	
May (Cambridge)	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McCrimmon	McDonald
McGuinty	McKay
McKenna	McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLeod (Northwest Territories)	Mendès
Medicino	Mihychuk
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Sœurs)	
Monsef	
Morneau	Morrissey
Murray	Nantel
Nassif	Nault
Ng	O'Connell
Oliphant	Oliver
O'Regan	Ouellette
Paradis	Pauzé
Peschisolido	Peterson
Petitpas Taylor	Philpott
Picard	Plamondon
Poissant	Quach
Qualtrough	Ramsey
Rankin	Ratansi
Rioux	Robillard
Rodriguez	Rogers
Romanado	Rota
Rudd	Ruimy
Rusnak	Sahota
Saini	Sajjan
Samson	Sangha
Sansoucy	Sarai
Scarpaleggia	Schiefke
Serré	Sgro
Shanahan	Sheehan
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Sikand	Simms
Sohi	Sorbara
Spengemann	Ste-Marie
Stetski	Tabbara
Tan	Tassi
Tootoo	Trudeau
Trudel	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Virani	Whalen
Wilkinson	Wilson-Raybould
Wrzesniewski	Yip
Zahid— 223	

PAIRED

Members

Bibeau	Leslie
Marci	Moore
Thériault	Young— 6

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

The hon. member for Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Alexander Nuttall: Mr. Speaker, I actually voted both for and against and want to apologize to the House for that.

I also want to say “let her speak”.

● (1640)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately there was confusion at the beginning, and I voted both for and against. Had I been at the committee this morning, I would have voted to allow our former attorney general to speak.

On this vote, I am voting for.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I want to clarify my vote. Had I been at the committee this morning, I would have voted against the cover-up.

With respect to this motion, I support the motion.

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I want to clarify my vote. I voted both for and against. It is a protest on my behalf for this cover-up. I think we should let her speak. The government should be ashamed of its attitude today.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, I would like the unanimous consent of the House to allow my vote to let her speak.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I understand that I may have voted twice in that last vote. I appreciate the fact that you are recognizing me and allowing me to speak to clarify the record by having me recorded as yea.

Allowing someone to speak allows for clarity and sunshine. Let her speak.

The Speaker: Of course, I have been allowing points of order. However, I invite members not to engage in debate on any points of order.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, the former attorney general has not been able to speak, and she deserves to speak. I would like to stand here—

The Speaker: Perhaps the member did not hear what I just said, which was that members should not engage in debate under points of order. Therefore, I would ask her to get to her point of order quickly.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, what I would like to do, then, is voice my opinion on this. I will be supporting this motion. Please remove me from the nays.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, in the recent division, I voted twice. I am voting in favour of this.

I also think it is very important that people are allowed to speak, so—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary Midnapore.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to apologize. I believe that I voted both for and against, but I will always vote for women to have the opportunity to speak and for the former attorney general—

The Speaker: The member was getting into debate.

The hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Mr. Speaker, I want to apologize as well. I believe I voted twice on this matter, with the confusion in the House these past couple of days and the confusion regarding who is allowed to speak and who is not allowed to speak.

I would like my vote to stand as yes, and let her speak.

Privilege

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Mr. Speaker, I too want to apologize. Apparently I voted twice, and I want to register that I vote in favour of this. Apparently, I was distracted by this document and I believe it is important to point out that not only was I distracted, but the people at committee were distracted on voting to let her speak.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I would like to apologize for voting twice. I am voting in favour of the motion because I am a woman and I have the right to speak. Let her speak.

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Viersen: Mr. Speaker, I would like to clarify my vote as well and it would be to support this motion, but I would also support the motion to let her speak.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Milton is rising on a question of privilege.

Before I go to her, which I will do, I want to note that a number of questions of privilege relate to matters in committee. Normally, the Speaker does not get involved in matters of committee. Second, there is an Order of the House to have something happen at this time, so I would ask her to focus on why, in this case, the Speaker should get involved.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

CIRCULATION OF COMMITTEE DOCUMENT

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your advice, and I am sure you will determine where you want to cut me off and stop me from speaking.

I rise today on a question of privilege concerning an egregious leak of proceedings at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights today. As required by the rules of practices of the House, I am raising it now at the earliest possible opportunity.

This morning, Liberal staff circulated to media assembled outside of our committee meeting a motion that was being put forward without notice, or table dropped as it is called, at the committee meeting. This motion was part of the Liberal effort to change the channel on the SNC-Lavalin scandal, which has been consuming the government and forcing it into a massive damage control effort. Of course, this move was not surprising, given that the Liberal members of the justice committee signalled last night in a letter to the committee chair, which was quite shocking, that the Liberals were shutting down justice committee hearings.

To put it simply, Liberal staff should not have been circulating this channel-changing motion while we were in the midst of learning about it inside the committee room. Often, the House has heard complaints about the leak of draft committee reports. However, the secrecy of in camera committee proceedings is just not applicable to draft reports.

Citation 57 of Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules and Forms, sixth edition, tells us the following, "The House has been in the past regarded the publication of the proceedings or reports of committee sitting *in camera* to be a breach of privilege."

Pages 1089 and 1090 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, state, "Divulging any part of the proceedings of an in camera committee meeting has been ruled by the Speaker to constitute a prima facie matter of privilege."

The associated footnote refers to a ruling of Mr. Speaker Fraser, on March 14, 1987, at page 6108 of the Debates, concerning the leak of a committee vote. As part of his finding of a prima facie case of privilege, your predecessor said:

I believe it is my duty on your behalf to state in categorical terms that when a committee resolves to meet *in camera*, all deliberations which take place at such meeting, including any votes which might be recorded, are intended to be confidential. All members attending such a meeting, together with any members of staff assisting the committee, are expected to respect the confidentiality of the proceedings which take place at that meeting. This place can only operate on the basis of respect for its rules and practice and of confidence and trust among its Members.

The matter was referred to the former Standing Committee on Elections, Privileges and Procedure which considered the matter. That committee said the following in its seventh report, at paragraphs 8 and 10:

An *in camera* meeting is one which occurs behind closed doors. It is a confidential meeting in that the public is excluded. Your Committee firmly believes in the value and importance of in camera meetings to committees of the House... This practice allows committees a measure of independence and enhances the collegiality of members, something which is necessary to effective committee work. The success of *in camera* meetings depends upon their privacy; their confidentiality must be respected by all involved. Without that respect, the work of all committees would be seriously imperilled to the detriment of the House and all Members.... When a committee chooses to meet *in camera*, all matters are confidential. Any departure from strict confidentiality should be by explicit committee decision which should deal with what matters may be published, in which form and by whom. Committees should make clear decisions about the circulation of draft reports, the disposition of evidence and the publication of their *Minutes*. Equally, committees should give careful consideration to the matters that should be dealt with *in camera* and matters that should be discussed in public.

Normally, committee problems are left for committees—

● (1645)

The Speaker: Before going to the member for Chilliwack—Hope, I will note of course that questions of privilege are normally heard at a certain time, either at the beginning of the day or after question period.

The member for Chilliwack—Hope is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, many critical points are being made by my colleague and due to the noise coming from the Liberal side, I cannot even hear the member and I am sitting right beside her. Therefore, I would ask that you bring the House to order.

The Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope for his interest in decorum and I trust that will continue in the future.

The hon. for Milton, whom I had asked to sum up.

Points of Order

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, I am at the matter that you asked me to address specifically, so I am going to take a bit of time to ensure I answer all your questions.

Normally, committee problems are left for the committees themselves to sort out. However, there are exceptions. The words of Mr. Speaker Fraser on March 26, 1990, at page 9756 of the Debates are very instructive. This is what he said:

The Speaker has often informed the House that matters of procedural issues that arise in committee ought to be settled in committee unless the committee reports them first to the House. I have, however, said to the House that this practice was not an absolute one and that in very serious and special circumstances the Speaker may have to pronounce on a committee matter without the committee having reported to the House.

This principle was acknowledged more recently by Speaker Milliken in his May 10, 2007, ruling, at page 9288 of the Debates, where he said, “Nevertheless, circumstances do exist in which the importance of a question may require intervention by the Chair.”

Such circumstances arose in a case where Mr. Speaker Fraser found, at page 14629 of the Debates for December 4, 1992, a *prima facie* case of privilege concerning the intimidation of a witness following her committee appearance by the CBC.

I would also like to refer the Chair to Mr. Speaker Milliken's ruling on November 29, 2010 at page 6560 of the Debates. In that case, as some members may personally recall, an individual on the staff of a finance committee member had divulged to lobbyists information about recommendations. Despite the employer member's sincere and unequivocal apology about the staff's actions, a *prima facie* case of privilege was found by the Speaker, who said:

This matter is thus not merely of direct personal concern to the member from whose office the leak came or even of concern to the finance committee which reported the leak. As I see it, this is a situation that is of importance to the whole House and all hon. members. It has an institutional dimension that cannot be ignored given the circumstances. The Chair must therefore determine whether it appears that the ability of members to carry out their parliamentary duties has been impeded.

Having considered carefully the arguments presented, I have reached the conclusion that, in this instance, members of the Standing Committee on Finance, individually and collectively, appear to have been impeded in their work. Accordingly, I have no alternative but to find that a *prima facie* breach of privilege has occurred.

Now to borrow Mr. Speaker Fraser's words about very serious and special circumstances, the situation involving the justice committee and the Liberal cover-up I would submit is one of those cases. To borrow Mr. Speaker Milliken view about an institutional concern, I would argue that this present situation is a fundamental and an institutional one.

Indeed, the point reminds me of the important ruling by Mr. Speaker Fraser on October 10, 1989, at page 4457 of the Debates, respecting presumptuous government advertising. This concern is doubly so in light of the letter published last evening on behalf of the Liberal members of the justice committee. Key words often quoted from that ruling should be reiterated, “we are a parliamentary democracy, not a so-called executive democracy, nor a so-called administrative democracy.”

Just let me roll back on this and why it is important. The fundamental issue of in camera is that only decisions that are deemed in “yes”, meaning that only motions that are voted in favour of, are then released to the public. When that Liberal staff member went out

and distributed this motion to members of the press individually, the presumption was made that this motion would pass in committee. That is what I am referring to here.

On this aspect of presuming a committee decision, allow me to draw the Chair's attention to the ruling by Mr. Speaker Zwozdesky of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, at page 292 of the Journals for December 2, 2013, concerning a government brochure which presumed, among other things, a decision to be taken by a legislative committee. In his ruling, the Alberta Speaker said:

It is clear to your chair that the advertising in the brochure I referenced earlier did presume that a decision had been made by the Members' Services Committee...That decision had not been made, in fact. That decision had not been made until the following Friday. Let me make sure I said that correctly: I am of the opinion that the advertising in the brochure presumed a decision that had not yet been made by the Members' Services Committee.

● (1650)

The continued absence of adherence to some of the proprieties of this institution causes your chair a great deal of grief and anguish...I would hope that the dignity and authority of this Assembly and of its delegated committees would be given greater respect from this day forward. Accordingly, your chair finds that the advertising undertaken by the government on page 6 of the aforementioned brochure, The Building Alberta Plan, does constitute a *prima facie* case of privilege.

In conclusion, I would respectfully submit that the Liberals' effort at the justice committee this morning to turn the channel away from the SNC-Lavalin scandal which has consumed this government constitutes a breach of privileges of the House.

Should you find a *prima facie* case of privilege, I am prepared to move the appropriate motion.

* * *

● (1655)

POINTS OF ORDER

BUDGET DOCUMENTS

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order as it relates to the upcoming budget speech.

The Minister of Finance made it clear to everybody in the lockup that the budget was embargoed until 4 p.m. It has been long-standing parliamentary convention in this place that the budget is not to be made public before the Minister of Finance makes it public in the House and presents it in the House. It has also been a long-standing convention that the budget is not to be released before North American equity markets close at 4 p.m. eastern standard time.

What happened is that well before 4 p.m., the Minister of Finance table dropped the budget, and then proceeded to go into the public sphere, the public realm, and start commenting about his very own budget, while everybody else was still embargoed and prevented from talking about it until 4 p.m.

I rise on this point of order and ask you, Mr. Speaker, to contemplate the matter, and ask you to rule on this at some future date, about whether or not parliamentary convention was followed and about whether or not breaches of privilege were executed on.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills, and of course I will come back to the House on that matter.

The Budget

I will also come back to the House on the question of privilege matter raised by the hon. member for Milton.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

CIRCULATION OF COMMITTEE DOCUMENT

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise on the question of privilege that was brought up by the MP for Milton.

I was at committee today for the incident that has been raised by my colleague in the House. I am also very concerned about the violation, the intentional breach that was accurately described here as what happened today in committee.

I have heard what my colleague has just stated and would like the opportunity to come back tomorrow to speak to the question.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, allow me to briefly address both points that have been raised by the official opposition and the member from the New Democratic Party.

The Minister of Finance duly tabled the budget 2019 documents in the House. That is not contrary to the rules. The opposition has been saying in the media that they will do everything to delay the presentation of the budget, as evidenced by the two motions debated yesterday during Routine Proceedings and further evidenced by the 257 opposed votes standing on the Order Paper.

On this side of the House, we want to deliver a strong budget. That is our duty as government—

The Speaker: I think the hon. parliamentary secretary is getting into debate. I would ask him to stick to the point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, on the second point. I thank the Speaker for the opportunity to respond to the intervention of the member for Milton.

The rules are very clear around in camera meetings. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, 2017, pages 1089 and 1090, states the following:

Divulging any part of the proceedings of an in camera committee meeting has been ruled by the Speaker to constitute a prima facie matter of privilege.

The key word here is “proceedings”. Making public a motion that one intends to move at a meeting is well within the rules. There is a high level of hypocrisy coming from the Conservatives on this very issue.

On February 28, the member for St. Albert—Edmonton released a letter publicly on Twitter—

The Speaker: That is getting into debate now. The hon. member for Chilliwack—Hope is rising on a point of order. I would remind members that I am subject to a House Order requiring us to move on to something else.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I want to go back to the vote that was held at 3:55 p.m., with the 30-minute bell. The vote result was announced before several members had time to clarify and ask for unanimous consent for their votes to be recorded in a certain way. I did not hear you, Mr. Speaker, after that happened.

I am not sure if the vote total stayed the same or if that was taken into account. I just did not hear that it was recorded for the House. I wonder if you could clarify what the result of that vote was.

• (1700)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for raising what is an important point. In fact, the results were adjusted accordingly, and the motion was defeated.

The member for St. Albert—Edmonton is rising, I think, on the same question of privilege. Again, I am subject to the House orders, so I will ask him to be very brief. He can, of course, come back on another occasion, perhaps tomorrow, but I would ask him to be very brief so that we can get on to what the House has ordered me to proceed with.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise because I was sitting in the justice committee when I was presented with a motion I had not seen before in an in camera meeting. Minutes later, Mercedes Stephenson was posting on Twitter a copy of that motion, which, I repeat, was a motion I did not see and that no member of the opposition saw during an in camera meeting when it was presented. During that time, the motion was leaked to Mercedes Stephenson. When the meeting was suspended and we briefed the media, we were told by multiple reporters that a Liberal staffer had presented that motion, again while we were meeting in camera. It was all part of a transparent attempt by the Liberals to change the channel on the SNC-Lavalin matter as they sought to silence the former attorney general.

With that, I fully endorse the submission made by the hon. member for Milton, and I join my friend, the member for Essex, with a request to speak to this matter tomorrow.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member.

The House will now proceed to the consideration of Ways and Means Motion No. 27 concerning the budget presentation.

Order. I have been quite lenient hearing quite a few points of order, and it is important to hear them. However, as I have said a few times, I am subject to a House order.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.) moved:

That this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

He said: Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Bill Morneau: Last week, I was back home in Toronto where I had a chance to visit with some young people at the Boys and Girls Club in Regent Park. It was March break last week, so they were pretty focused on having fun, like kids their age should be.

The Budget

However, it was clear to me from their questions and from their interactions, how much they cared about each other, about their community and about the world beyond it.

It was a good reminder of what is at stake and of who is counting on us to get things right.

[*Translation*]

Today, I am happy to share our government's fourth budget entitled "Investing in the Middle Class".

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1705)

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, order. I want to remind members that delay is a tactic that is permissible up to a certain point in the House. Obstruction is not. I am the servant of the House, and as a servant of the House, I am acting in accordance with the House order, and I am required to allow the matter to continue.

The hon. Minister of Finance has the floor.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, just to reiterate, when we came into government in the fall of 2015, unemployment was stubbornly high, wages were stagnant and consumer confidence was in decline. Those are the facts. That was the outcome of years of cuts.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1710)

Hon. Bill Morneau: These are just some of the highlights of three and a half years spent working hard every day to strengthen and grow the middle class and make life more affordable for hard-working Canadian families.

Compared to where we were just a few years ago, our economy is doing very well. Since November 2015, hard-working Canadians have created more than 900,000 new jobs, most of them full time. In the last year alone, of all the new jobs created, more than half, 54%, went to Canada's talented—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Bill Morneau: We get Canadian families who are more than \$2,000 better off this year, and every year, than they were back in 2015. We also get a country where the middle class is strong and growing, with an economy that works for everyone.

What we need is a concrete and responsible plan to address these very real concerns, so that we build a strong country and a strong economy that gives Canadians every chance at success—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Bill Morneau: Our government has been clear since day one. We are going to invest in the middle class and in the things that matter most to Canadians: good jobs, strong communities, a clean environment and better opportunities for future generations. We are going to make these investments to grow our economy for the long term, while we bring the books back toward balance.

When it comes to housing, we have heard from Canadians in communities of all sizes, including our largest cities, like Toronto and Vancouver. They have told us that finding an affordable place to

call home is not just a challenge. For too many hard-working Canadians, especially for young people, it feels like—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1715)

The Speaker: Order, please. I want to remind members of Standing Order 83(2), which provides:

An Order of the Day for the consideration of a Ways and Means motion or motions shall be designated at the request of a Minister rising in his or her place in the House. When such an Order is designated for a Budget presentation, the Minister shall specify the date and time thereof and the Order shall be deemed to be an Order of the House to sit beyond the ordinary hour of daily adjournment, if required. At the specified time, the Speaker shall interrupt any proceedings then before the House and such proceedings shall be deemed adjourned; and the House shall proceed forthwith to the consideration of the Ways and Means motion for the Budget presentation.

At 5 p.m. on April 27, 1989, Speaker Fraser was in the process of hearing arguments on a question of privilege raised concerning an alleged budget leak. He interrupted the arguments, which he agreed to give a further hearing to at a later time, in order to permit the budget presentation. At that time, the Speaker stated, in Debates on April 27, 1989, at page 1060:

The difficulty the Speaker is in, in this present situation, is that while fully understanding the position of the Official Opposition and the New Democratic Party and fully understanding the reason for it, the fact of the matter is that we now have a House Order, which was passed by the House. I can see no way that I can unilaterally change that.

He continued, after indicating his intention to hear further argument:

However, while I do not know what may eventually happen on the privilege issue, I do know what the House has done with the special House Order. I must advise Hon. Members that I am bound by it. Therefore, it is my duty to recognize the Hon. Minister of Finance.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley is rising on a brief point of order.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, thank you for that ruling.

As I was attempting to listen to the finance minister deliver the budget speech, it was, of course, impossible for any member in the House, perhaps even those adjacent to the finance minister, to hear the speech. It is a long-standing privilege in this place that we are able to hear one another, even in the vigorous debates this House sometimes enjoys.

I wonder if there might be a path forward, through you, Mr. Speaker, to allow the small discussion that was attempted prior to the speech taking place. That would enable us to actually continue with the business of the House today and hear the speech, so that members of Parliament and Canadians, through us, can understand what the government is proposing in its budget.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton is responding to the same point of order, briefly I hope.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The point I was attempting to raise earlier on is that the finance minister already presented the budget earlier today, at about five minutes to four o'clock. That was his budget presentation. He was given the opportunity to do so. It just so happens that the presentation occurred before the close of trading on the financial markets, which is at the very least a breach of good management, and possibly something more serious.

The Budget

However, the reality is that the finance minister has had an opportunity to speak once already. If he is going to be allowed to speak twice, then why is it that the former attorney general has only had an opportunity to speak once and cannot speak again?

● (1720)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley and the hon. member for Carleton for their comments. Of course, the finance minister rose earlier on a point of order. He is now speaking on the ways and means motion and the budget presentation. Therefore, the Minister of Finance has the floor.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for allowing me to proceed. It has obviously been a pleasure to start this speech. I hope the House has heard the parts I have already delivered, but I want to continue from where I was.

What I was getting at was some things that we want to do in the housing market. In particular, I was talking about the fact that we want to take action to crack down on the people who break the rules, who evade taxes or use real estate for money laundering, making housing less affordable for the people who need it.

We want to help more middle-class families find an affordable home today. We are offering new, targeted support for first-time homebuyers. This includes increasing the RRSP homebuyers' plan withdrawal limit to \$35,000 from \$25,000, to reflect the realities of house prices today. It includes a new initiative called the first-time homebuyer incentive, which will allow eligible first-time homebuyers to finance a portion of their home purchase through a shared equity mortgage with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, or CMHC. The incentive would give eligible buyers a new source of funds they can use to help keep their monthly costs lower—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I am going to go very briefly to the hon. Leader of the Opposition on a point of order.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The actions of the government today have been unprecedented and an assault on democracy. They have shut down the only public investigation into the Prime Minister's SNC-Lavalin corruption scandal, a scandal that touches upon the finance minister himself. The finance minister is today presenting a budget after he has been implicated in an unprecedented assault on the independent rule of law.

Conservatives will not sit idly by while Liberals destroy the integrity of our justice system.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, I would like to summarize what I have been presenting over the course of the last number of minutes for Canadians, because I know Canadians want to hear what this government is trying to do to ensure that all of us continue to have the good fortune that we expect.

We come into budget 2019 having had very positive economic results over the last three and a half years. We made the decision in

2015 to invest in Canadians. Those investments in Canadians—the addition of the Canada child benefit, for example, and the introduction of the Canada workers benefit—have had important impacts on where we found ourselves economically.

We find ourselves today with the lowest unemployment rates we have seen for 40 years. We have higher workforce participation for women. We have higher workforce participation for disabled people. We have higher workforce participation for indigenous people. We have higher workforce participation for new immigrants. We have higher workforce participation for youth.

That is the position from which we start in thinking about how we can continue to invest in middle-class Canadians. We know that even with those important efforts over the last three and a half years, people remain anxious about the future. They worry about the changes in the global economy. They worry about the things that they and their families are facing today and tomorrow.

Therefore, we know that our work is not done. We know that need to deal with those anxieties and those challenges in a real and important way so that people can continue to have confidence in the future, and that is what budget 2019 is doing.

First and foremost, we thought about our housing market. We have made important efforts over the last three and a half years to make our market more stable. That has been important.

We know that through our investment in affordable housing, we have created more housing units across the country. That is important.

We also know that millennials still see that the possibility of getting into the home market is very challenging, so we have moved forward this year with some important measures to deal with that. We have moved forward with measures that are going to enable people to get into housing because they are going to be able to have a less expensive mortgage.

● (1725)

[*Translation*]

If someone wants to buy a new condo for \$400,000, for example, they could use the incentive to finance 10%, or \$40,000. This makes it a little easier for people to buy their first home. This extra money up front reduces the size of their insured mortgage, lowering their mortgage payments by more than \$225 a month, or more than \$2,700 per year.

That is real help for people who want to own their own home. It is real help for young people, for families and for Canadians who need just that little extra help to make their dream of owning a home a reality.

We have also heard from Canadian workers who are anxious about the changing world of work. This includes young and unemployed Canadians who need help getting into the job market. It also includes more experienced workers, who worry that their existing skills might not be enough for them to find and keep good jobs until it is time to retire, or who want new skills so that they can move up in their current jobs.

*The Budget**[English]*

Our government believes that Canadians at all stages in their working lives should have the opportunity to learn new skills to take control of their future. To help working Canadians get these skills, we are introducing a new program: the Canada training benefit.

It is a personalized, portable benefit that will help people plan for and get the training they need. It consists of a training credit that will give working Canadians \$250 every year to put toward the cost of future training, a credit that will add up to as much as \$5,000 over a career.

It also includes a training support benefit, operated through the employment insurance program. With this support, workers will not have to choose between their training needs and their family's needs. They can take the time they need to learn new skills, knowing they have help to cover their living expenses along the way.

Finally, we intend to move forward with leave provisions in conjunction with provinces and territories so that workers can take the time they need for training without worrying about losing their jobs.

Taken together, this means that working Canadians will get four weeks for training every four years with up to \$1,000 to help pay for the training, income support to cover lost income and the security of knowing they will have a job to come back to when their training is done. It will give working Canadians greater confidence about their ability to provide for their families down the road.

• (1730)

[Translation]

For employers, it will mean a workforce that has the skills and confidence needed to help grow their businesses and our economy. To make sure that small businesses will not have to pay the price for this new benefit, we will introduce a new EI small business premium rebate.

While the Canada training benefit will help working Canadians succeed, we also know that more needs to be done to help young Canadians get a good start in their working lives. That is why we are taking steps to make education more affordable by lowering the interest rate on Canada student loans and Canada apprentice loans. For the 99% of student borrowers who have a floating interest rate on their Canada student loans, the interest they pay will be lowered to the prime lending rate. That will be very important to students, young people and our economy.

We know that young people want more opportunities to learn while they work and to work while they learn, so we are expanding the student work placement program. This will enable students in all fields, not just those in math and science fields, to find good work placements and get the experience they need.

With this budget, we are setting a target of creating up to 84,000 new student work placements per year across Canada in five years' time. We will be working closely with businesses to create long-term benefits for Canadians. This will be a significant step toward ensuring that, 10 years from now, every young Canadian who wants a work placement will be able to get one.

[English]

We have also heard from Canadians who believe strongly, as does our government, that no Canadian should have to go without the medication they need simply because they cannot afford it, yet that is the reality for too many of our friends and neighbours, who struggle under the weight of some of the highest drug costs in the world. When people cannot afford the medicine they need, they are less healthy and less able to contribute in their families, in their work and in their communities, and that costs all of us. Therefore, guided by the early work of the advisory council on the implementation of national pharmacare, we are taking action.

First we will work with provinces and territories on the creation of the Canadian drug agency, which could use its bulk buying power to negotiate better prescription drug prices on behalf of all Canadians.

This would help individual Canadians and seniors and families afford the medicines they need. It would also support the sustainability of the drug plans they rely on today and pave the way for national pharmacare tomorrow.

Second, to help Canadians access the prescription drugs they need no matter where they live, this new agency will work with the provinces and territories to determine which medicines represent the best value for money for Canadians right across the country.

Third, to help Canadians with rare diseases access the drugs that they need, we will take steps to help make some of the most expensive drugs more accessible through a national strategy for high-cost drugs for rare diseases.

Parents of children with rare diseases know these costs all too well. It is not just dollars and cents to these moms and dads: It is nights spent sleeping by a hospital bed, it is a constant worry that never goes away, and it is knowing how much happier and healthier their kids could be if they could just get the treatment that they need.

We know that these measures alone will not fully close the gap for people who need prescription drugs and cannot afford them, but they do mark important first steps on the way to a system that helps all Canadians to get the medicine that they need.

Our publicly funded universal health care system is a source of pride for Canadians and a source of strength for our country. It is a legacy that we are building on with this budget.

We look forward to receiving the advisory council's final report later this spring as we move towards national pharmacare for Canada.

The Budget

● (1735)

[Translation]

With this budget, we are also doing more for Canada's seniors. Women and men who have worked hard their entire lives deserve a secure and dignified retirement, free of financial worries. These are the Canadians we have helped with the increase to the guaranteed income supplement top-up for single seniors, which boosted benefits for nearly 900,000 low-income seniors and lifted about 57,000 seniors out of poverty.

We also helped to put thousands of dollars back in the pockets of Canadians as they become seniors, by restoring the eligibility age for old age security and the guaranteed income supplement back to 65, after the previous government forced people to wait an extra two years before they could receive those benefits.

[English]

With this budget we are taking additional steps to make retirement more financially secure for more Canadians.

To ensure that all Canadian workers receive the full value of the Canada pension plan benefits to which they have contributed, we will proactively enrol Canada pension plan contributors who are 70 or older and who have not yet applied to receive their retirement benefits. With this one change, as many as 40,000 seniors will begin to receive an average of an extra \$300 per month starting next year.

To help low-income working seniors, we are enhancing the guaranteed income supplement earnings exemption so that seniors who wish to work can keep more of their pay and benefits.

As important as it is to our shared success that we continue to invest in people, we also know that it is vitally important that we also invest in building a better Canada. That means building strong communities, and one of the ways we do that is by making sure that our cities and our towns have the resources they need to invest in local priorities, whether it is expanding a public transit route, repairing potholes in the spring or building a new playground or community garden.

To give our communities the help they need and to ensure that money earmarked for communities is invested as intended, we will be giving a one-time boost to municipalities through a municipal infrastructure top-up, doubling this year's federal commitment through the gas tax fund.

Transferring funds to communities gets projects built, projects like the Minto Park concession building in Dawson City; the Emerald Park soccer facility in Edenwold, Saskatchewan; and the Armand-Lavoie Amphitheatre in Tracadie, New Brunswick.

[Translation]

Canada's communities are a priority. We promised this help, and we are delivering it.

We also know that in today's connected world, it is more important than ever that Canadians have fast and reliable access to the Internet. This includes everyone, from small businesses looking to reach customers around the world, to seniors who want to stay in touch with family and friends, to college students who want to move

home for the summer but still be able to take online courses or apply for work.

For all these people, high-speed Internet is a necessity, not a luxury. That is why, in today's budget, we are announcing a new national plan to get us there.

● (1740)

[English]

By 2030, every Canadian home and small business will have access to high-speed Internet, no matter where they are located.

For those people who say 2030 is a long time away, I want to make sure they know that work is already under way. Supported by the accelerated investment incentive introduced last fall, service providers are already working to bring high-speed Internet to more Canadian homes in rural and remote locations.

Building a better Canada also means helping people be part of the clean economy, with energy bills that they can afford and cleaner ways to get around.

That is why, with this budget, we are taking steps to make zero-emission vehicles more affordable for more Canadians, with a new federal purchase incentive of up to \$5,000 for electric battery or hydrogen fuel cell vehicles for Canadians who want to make the switch and pay less at the pump. We will also provide immediate expensing to a full range of zero-emission vehicles, so that businesses that want to switch over their fleet can recoup that investment sooner.

To help make monthly electricity bills more affordable, we will enter into a partnership with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to offer funds to make homes and businesses more energy efficient. This will help support retrofits, like new hot water systems or rooftop solar panels, that can help lower monthly bills.

At the same time, we know that building a better Canada must, by definition, include advancing reconciliation with indigenous peoples. That is why budget 2019 includes important new measures to help advance self-determination and improve the quality of life for first nations, Inuit and Métis Nation peoples.

It includes new investments to better uphold Jordan's principle, so that first nations children can get the help they need, when they need it, where they need it. It includes new support for indigenous languages, for indigenous entrepreneurs and businesses, for mental health and home care, and for emergency response, all critical parts of healthy and successful indigenous communities.

Most critically, it includes continued investments to make sure that these communities have clean, safe water. There are, today, children living on reserve in Canada who cannot safely drink or bathe in or even play in the water that comes out of their taps. That is not okay.

The Budget

We will continue to work hard and make the investments that are needed to finally make this right. So far, we have lifted more than 80 long-term water advisories, and we are on track to eliminate all of the advisories in the next two years.

[*Translation*]

I have shared some details about what budget 2019 will mean for the middle class and people working hard to join it, for working Canadians, young Canadians, seniors and indigenous peoples.

However, I also want to be very clear that this is a budget for people and for communities all across this country.

That includes people who come together to learn, work and pray. Wherever we gather, Canadians should always feel safe. That is why, with this budget, we are doubling our investments to protect our communities from crimes motivated by intolerance and hate.

To better counter racism in Canada, we are moving forward with a new anti-racism strategy. These two measures are especially important right now in our country.

Also, in recognition of the United Nations Decade for People of African Descent, we will work with community leaders to help celebrate and raise awareness of black Canadian communities.

To give more people here in Canada and around the world a chance to see, hear and appreciate our talented and diverse artists, we are making new investments that will help support our musicians and bring festivals and performing arts series to more communities across the country.

● (1745)

[*English*]

Canada is also a country where we take care of each other in our times of need, including times of serious and life-threatening mental distress. To support people who need immediate crisis support, we will work with experienced and dedicated partners to support, across Canada, a suicide prevention service. It will be available in English and French by phone, text or chat, 24-7, so that no one who needs help goes without.

For people in the prairie provinces and parts of western Canada who are critically ill or injured and need emergency medical help, we are investing \$65 million in new emergency ambulance helicopters for the region's Shock Trauma Air Rescue Service, or STARS.

Because we know that our prairie provinces are especially vulnerable to the extreme weather events that go hand-in-hand with climate change, and because we value our hard-working farmers and ranchers who help to feed us and keep our economy strong, we will work with our western partners on a plan to protect water and soil in the Prairies.

[*Translation*]

To ensure that Canada's dairy, poultry and egg farmers can continue to provide Canadians with high-quality products in a world of freer trade, we will make available an income protection program for supply-managed farmers, along with a measure to protect the value of quota investments these farmers have already made.

In the east, to maintain safe and reliable ferry services that people in Atlantic Canada rely on, we will extend support for existing services and look to procure three new modern ferries.

[*English*]

Even for those who do not speak French, that is a good measure.

In communities all across the country, we know that hundreds of thousands of Canadians are living with cancer. Every single day, about 565 people receive a cancer diagnosis and around 220 people die from cancer. It is something that touches every community and most of our families. To help give more cancer patients and their families help and hope, we will provide the Terry Fox Research Institute with up to \$150 million to establish a national Marathon of Hope cancer centres network.

● (1750)

Another illness that touches the lives of millions of Canadians is dementia. With this budget, we are investing \$50 million to support Canada's first national dementia strategy. This will give people living with dementia a better quality of life and ensure that their caregivers, who are primarily women, get the help and support they need as well.

[*Translation*]

To ensure that our asylum system is fair and effective, supporting Canada's reputation as a country that is welcoming as well as governed by the rule of law, we will invest in a comprehensive border enforcement strategy, to better detect and intercept people who cross into Canada irregularly and those that attempt to exploit our immigration system.

[*English*]

We will also renew our Middle East strategy for another two years to support humanitarian, development, stabilization, security, intelligence and diplomatic activities across the region, in addition to our military contribution.

To ensure greater fairness in our tax system, we will take action to limit the benefit of the stock option deduction for executives of large, long-established corporations, while ensuring that everyday employees are not affected and that start-ups and emerging Canadian businesses can continue to grow, attract talent and create more good jobs.

We live in a world that is changing and changing quickly. Canadians know that we cannot stop the trends that are already transforming the world around us, things like new technologies and more automation. All that they ask for is a chance to find their way in this new world, with help from the government so that they can have their best shot at building a good future for themselves, their children and their grandchildren.

The Budget

[Translation]

That is what we are doing with this budget. We are investing in the middle class and in their future, so that when young people graduate from school, they already have the experience they need to get a good job, with student debt they can afford to pay down and a real chance at owning their own home.

We are investing in the middle class so that when seniors retire, they can look forward to spending their time with family and friends, not worrying about how they will pay their bills every month.

[English]

We have invested so that every Canadian can feel good about what the future holds, be confident about their place in the changing world and so that Canadian kids, like the ones I spent time with last week in Toronto, can grow up in a country where nothing holds them back.

That is what is at stake. That is what we can accomplish together when we invest in the middle class.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is covering up his corruption with \$41 billion in brand new spending that he will pay for with higher taxes after the election, if he is re-elected. In this sense, it is the most expensive cover-up in the history of cover-ups. It is the Liberal two-step: big deficit spending to distract from corruption before the election and big tax hikes to pay for it after the election.

Here we are, full circle. In the last budget, the finance minister quietly introduced changes to the Criminal Code that allowed large corporations accused of fraud, bribery and other corruption to avoid trial by signing a special deal. We did not know why he was doing that, but we soon found out when we learned that the finance minister and the Prime Minister pressured the former attorney general to offer a special deal to end the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin for over \$100 million of bribery and fraud.

The finance minister has, so far, been running scared and unwilling to answer questions about the pressure he applied on the former attorney general. She testified to that pressure. She said that his chief of staff did likewise to her personnel.

If the finance minister has nothing to hide, will he appear before a parliamentary committee to answer questions about the pressure and the interference he carried out on the former attorney general with regard to the SNC-Lavalin corruption scandal, yes or no?

• (1755)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for talking about our budget for a very brief part of his commentary. I want to address those issues first and foremost.

What he said was, in fact, in one way, absolutely true. We have decided to make investments on behalf of middle-class Canadians so that we can improve their situation over the long term.

As Canadians look at budget 2019, they will see this as particularly good news. They will see that what this government has done since the very beginning is make investments in them and in their future. They will also see that those investments have demonstrably worked. What has happened over the last three and a half years is that there have been investments in Canadians,

investments in their families and more jobs and opportunities for their children. We are in a much better situation than we have been in for the entirety of the hon. member for Carleton's life in terms of having much lower unemployment than he has ever seen in his life.

I go out to see people in my constituency, as the member for Carleton goes out to see people in his constituency. What he will find if he does that during the day is that people will actually be at work, because they are working in good, full-time jobs that have been created over the last three and a half years. That is the kind of effort we have made on behalf of Canadians. We are going to continue doing that each and every day.

Where the member for Carleton was absolutely incorrect was when he talked about the impact of what the Liberals have done. If he looked carefully at the numbers, he would recognize that we have the very best balance sheet among G7 countries, and we have made it better every single year. We have reduced our amount of debt every single year as a proportion of our economy. That is important for us to notice, and it is important for all Canadians to see. Investing in Canadians in a fiscally responsible way is a way for the future of this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, the Liberal government presented its last-chance budget. As with the previous budgets from the past few years, this was a missed opportunity. Since the government is embroiled in a scandal involving political interference in the justice system, it knew that this was probably its last chance to effect significant, lasting change. However, this is just another missed opportunity. Instead, the government is fuelling political cynicism by repeating election promises it made in 2015 and has yet to keep. It is now 2019.

The pharmacare that the Liberals have been promising for 20 years will have to wait. During the election campaign, the Liberals will try to make people believe that this time, it will work out, and that they can trust them.

Supply-managed farmers will also have to wait to get any money, even though the impact of CETA and the TPP has been known for some time. They will have to wait until after the election. What is more, there is nothing about NAFTA 2.0.

Tax fairness will also have to wait, as the Liberals admitted that they have recovered only a fraction of the \$25 billion targeted. Deductions for stock options are known to be very regressive. The Minister of Finance says that we will have to do something about that later. In the meantime, \$1.3 billion went into the pockets of 2,000 people who earned more than \$1 million in 2017. The web giants continue to get a free pass under the Liberal government until the next election.

The Budget

The worst thing of all is the lack of ambition with respect to the environment. Young people marched in the streets last Friday and on the weekend calling for concrete action on climate change. The Liberals allocated a measly \$87 million. Of the \$40 billion in new government expenditures, \$87 million has been allocated to Environment and Climate Change Canada.

My question is simple. Considering the clear lack of leadership on this crucial issue, when will the minister and his government step aside and let real leaders on climate change turn things around?

• (1800)

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, we decided to proceed with our approach of investing in the middle class, in the measures that the member mentioned. For example, we have taken significant steps towards a national pharmacare system. This is very important. We had a report. We started with measures that will serve as a foundation for our system. We must be responsible, so that Canadians have access to a system that works in the long term. This is our approach and it is very important.

As for supply management, we have clearly explained that we found an approach. There will be \$2.4 billion for the supply management sector. This is the same approach as the previous government's. This is significant. We will continue holding discussions to ensure that this sector remains stable.

With respect to climate change, our party is the one that decided to put a price on carbon. This is the most significant thing we did to improve our situation. We will continue with this strategy because we know that it is very important to our future and to our children's and grandchildren's futures.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by saying that the Bloc Québécois in no way endorses the Conservative Party's actions during the budget speech. We have a great deal of respect for tradition in the House, and there are solemn moments that deserve respect. There are also times for debate. Democracy is first and foremost about debate, not about making noise.

Minister, when you presented your budget, I noticed that Quebec was ignored—

The Speaker: Order. I would ask the member to address his comments through the Chair.

Mr. Louis Plamondon: Mr. Speaker, as a new member, I forgot about that.

In the budget presented by the Minister of Finance, there is no mention of what Quebec wanted. The three main items that the Legault government had raised were Montreal's blue line, Quebec City's streetcars and a contract for the Davie shipyard. None of those are in the budget.

We had also hoped that web giants would be taxed just like Bell and Vidéotron. This will be a big disappointment for Quebec.

Hon. Bill Morneau: Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking the member for his comments about decorum in the House. That is very important.

We certainly continue to work with the Government of Quebec. We have spoken with its representatives several times to ensure that

we are collaborating on implementing our approach and our infrastructure investments, which will improve the situation in Quebec. That is important.

We will be collaborating on other issues, such as our pharmacare system. We will continue to work with the Government of Quebec to make things better for the people of Quebec. That is very important.

• (1805)

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is covering up his corruption under \$41 billion of brand new spending, which he will pay for with higher taxes if he is re-elected. This must be the biggest and most expensive cover-up in the history of cover-ups. It is the new Liberal two-step: Use massive deficits to get out of a big scandal before Canadians vote, and then hit them with tax hikes after they vote.

It is interesting, the irony that is in the air today, because it was a year ago that this Minister of Finance stood in this place to introduce a budget and failed to mention a tiny little detail that he wanted to sneak into the eventual 600-page omnibus budget bill that he would introduce. That was an amendment to the Criminal Code. It was discovered in the finance committee as members from all parties were leafing through this massive tome of paper and stumbled upon an amendment to the Criminal Code.

The reaction was astonishment by all sides. In fact, the Liberal member for Hull—Aylmer said it left a bad taste in his mouth. He said that he had the impression, in reading the amendment, that if he stole just \$10 he would be in trouble, but that if he stole \$10 million he would be just fine. That was how he interpreted the finance minister's amendments to the Criminal Code.

What boggled us all was the question of who was asking for this. We had travelled around our communities and we had not stumbled upon a single person who was interested in helping corporate crooks get off without conviction, so why would the finance minister slip such a measure into that budget? We found out, did we not?

In February of this year, The Globe and Mail broke a story that the Prime Minister had personally and politically pressured his attorney general in order to shelve the charges against a Liberal-linked corporation, SNC-Lavalin. Lavalin was known to everyone as the company that gave \$100,000 of illegal donations to the Liberal Party, having been caught and having to return that money. It was known for prominent links through its massive army of lobbyists, who swarm around the Hill and spend inordinate amounts of time, according to the public lobbyist registry, with people like the finance minister and the staff of the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister said that none of it was true, that it was all a lie. As proof that it was all a lie, he said that his attorney general was in his cabinet, and if she was so upset, why did she not leave? The next day she did. She resigned from his cabinet.

The Budget

Eventually, we learned more. After a massive pressure campaign to let her speak, the Prime Minister backed down and lifted—partially—the gag order on the former attorney general. He allowed her to appear before the justice committee and to speak, but not too much. She was only allowed to testify about events that occurred before she was removed as attorney general. Anything that happened after that period was to remain a secret. She did not have legal authorization as a former minister to say anything.

Therefore, when the former attorney general was asked why she resigned, she indicated she could not say. When she was asked about her meetings with the Prime Minister in January and February, she told us she could not say. She did name seven senior officials in the current Liberal government who she says “interfered”, “made veiled threats”, “hounded”, and “pressured” her to shelve the charges into SNC-Lavalin. She even went as far as to compare it to the “Saturday Night Massacre”, a reference to Richard Nixon’s Watergate firings.

What did the government do then? Soon afterward, there were attacks on her. Senior Liberals, including a former deputy Liberal Prime Minister, attacked her for her indigenous roots and for her gender.

● (1810)

The Liberals then sent out Michael Wernick to give a partisan speech. This is the Prime Minister’s supposedly non-partisan top public service official. He turned the top public service official into a partisan actor, and we have seen the scandal unfold from there.

So far, it has been an incredible spectacle. The former attorney general has resigned. The Treasury Board president has resigned. The top public servant in the Liberal government has resigned, and the Prime Minister’s principal secretary and best friend, his most important adviser, has resigned. Everyone has resigned, but no one did anything wrong, the Liberals assure us.

Today, just to make sure, the Conservatives put forward a motion at the justice committee to continue the investigation, to allow the former attorney general to complete her testimony and to call the full list of top government officials she says pressured her so that they could be questioned under oath. The Prime Minister sent his majority members and shut down the investigation to make sure that the truth would not come to light.

We know that the justifications the Liberals have given for all these cover-ups and scandals make no sense. They claimed that it was all about jobs. The Prime Minister claimed that the headquarters of the company would leave immediately if the former attorney general did not interfere and shelve the charges. We now know that this is impossible. The company must stay headquartered in Montreal on the basis of a \$1.5-billion loan agreement with the Quebec pension plan.

We also know that SNC-Lavalin is responsible for the five biggest construction projects in Canada, worth \$52 billion, which physically can only be done here in Canada. We cannot have a rail transit system for the city of Ottawa built in London, England, or in Beijing

and then dropped out of a helicopter onto the nation’s capital. It obviously has to be done here, and therefore, the jobs not only are going nowhere but can go nowhere.

Furthermore, we know that the public procurement minister is working on an exemption so that even if the company is convicted, it will still be allowed to bid on federal contracts. Therefore, this is not about jobs. This is about protecting corporate cronies of the Prime Minister.

Today the Prime Minister carried out another abuse of power. The first was when he tried to interfere with the justice system, and today he interfered with the justice committee to shut down the investigation and cover up what is to be—

The Speaker: I want to refer the member to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* by Bosc and Gagnon, third edition, which, at page 902, states:

Following the budget speech, the Speaker recognizes a representative of the official opposition, usually the finance critic, who, after a brief speech, moves the adjournment of the debate, which is then deemed adopted. In doing so, that Member reserves the right to speak first when debate on the motion resumes at a subsequent sitting. The Speaker then adjourns the House until the next sitting day.

Can I presume that the member will be wrapping up quickly?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Yes, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that polite reminder. I will, indeed, wrap up very quickly, to the great dismay of the many supporters I have around me today anxious to have me continue.

The reality is that the Prime Minister is spending \$41 billion in brand new spending to drown out the corruption scandal of SNC-Lavalin, money he will pay for, if he is re-elected, through massive tax increases. This is the same strategy Kathleen Wynne, whose adviser was Gerald Butts, imposed on Ontario.

It is not new to the Prime Minister to do such things. After all, he has raised taxes before on Canadian families. He has covered up the true cost of his carbon tax, and he is running out of other people’s money. This latest spending splurge will cost Canadian taxpayers a fortune. He knows a lot about a fortune, as he inherited one, but most Canadians do not, so they cannot afford higher taxes.

In conclusion, we, as the official opposition, will champion amendments to this budget, which will require the government to live within its means, leave more in people’s pockets, make life more affordable and let Canadians get ahead.

With that, I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1815)

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2), the motion is deemed adopted and the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m.

(The House adjourned at 6:16 p.m.)

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