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(HANSARD)

Monday, April 1, 2019

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, April 1, 2019

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

• (1105)

[*English*]

THE BUDGET

REVISIONS TO SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION TABLES

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on March 19, 2019, the Minister of Finance tabled in this House the budget documents for 2019. Out of respect for Parliament, I wish to table, in both official languages, revisions to supplementary information tables, specifically tables A2.11, A2.12, A2.13 and A2.14, located in annex 2 of budget 2019.

These tables provide detailed supplementary information on the cash requirements of measures announced in budget 2019. The purpose of these tables is to allow the reader to reconcile the budget and main estimates documents. The original budget document tabled in Parliament on March 19, 2019 contained labelling and transcription errors that have since been corrected in this revised version. These corrections do not impact any of the fiscal projections or balances contained in the core budget document, such as the budgetary balance.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed from January 30 consideration of the motion that Bill C-420, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, the Official Languages Act and the Canada Business Corporations Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will continue my speech on the part of the bill concerning the application of the Charter of the French Language to private-sector businesses under federal jurisdiction.

We have seen that the Official Languages Act, Canada's blueprint for linguistic development, is at odds with Quebec's blueprint, the Charter of the French Language. The Official Languages Act is

designed to ensure access to services in both official languages where numbers warrant. It is a model based on the principle of institutional bilingualism founded on individual rights. In every other country in the world that uses this model, the minority languages are being assimilated. That is what is happening in all of the anglophone provinces of Canada, where the assimilation of francophones continues to grow with each passing year.

The only way to ensure the future of a language is to make it the common public language in a given geographic area. For instance, here in Ottawa, two people with different linguistic or cultural backgrounds will naturally communicate in English, because English is the common language in most of Canada. What is not accepted here in English Canada, and does not seem to be accepted by any Quebec MP from a national party, is the idea that French could be the common public language in Quebec, meaning people with different linguistic backgrounds would communicate in French in the workplace. The Charter of the French Language was created to guarantee the right to work in French and to make French the common language at work.

We saw how the member who chairs the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights reacted to that. He got very upset and said the Bloc Québécois wants anglophones in Quebec to have fewer rights than other Canadians. From our perspective, that is astounding. I think what he meant to say was that he thinks anglophones in Quebec should have the right to speak only English, just like other Canadians. Only 9% of anglophones in English Canada can speak French, so the only way to ensure the survival of French in Quebec is to make it the common tongue. Sadly, not even federalist parties are on board with that idea.

Another member told us about a 2013 Government of Canada study on language of work in federally regulated businesses. According to the study, some 170,000 employees work in federally regulated workplaces—about 35,000 of them in Crown corporations and 135,000 in private businesses. Those workers have no recourse under the Official Languages Act or the Charter of the French Language. They have fewer rights than other Quebecers when it comes to working in French. We have shared stats about this.

Private Members' Business

The other problem is that since the Official Languages Act seeks to provide services in French where numbers warrant, which does not work, the shift to English has been steadily growing in every province—even in Quebec, in some places. The data is therefore being misrepresented. Linguistic indicators are being created because they are supposedly more inclusive. We see that in the reform proposed by the Minister of Official Languages. The indicators are being changed in order to make it appear as though there are more francophones than there really are.

Naturally, there will be no complaints from the francophone and Acadian communities, because they have the numbers that warrant services in French. However, instead of changing the very principle in the legislation that jeopardizes the future of French in Canada and Quebec, the government is changing the linguistic indicators, which paints a far rosier picture. The study before us concludes that a majority of Quebecers can work in French. That is not at all what common language is about.

• (1110)

Various indicators show that the use of French increased as the common language in the workplace and as the primary language of work, specifically after Bill 101 passed and until sometime in the 1980s. It was then that the Charter of the French Language was weakened considerably, and the federal government was the main culprit, since it funded lobby groups that sought to weaken the Charter of the French Language.

In private sector businesses across Quebec, the percentage of the labour force working generally in French was 70.8% in 1989 and 59.7% in 2010. On the island of Montreal, it was 45.3% in 1989 and 32.1% in 2010.

If all the data presented in the study are analyzed properly, it is clear that French is definitely not the common language in Quebec workplaces. The federal government is one of the main obstacles, if not the primary obstacle, to ensuring that French is the language of work, the common language in the workplace. We in the Bloc Québécois have been fighting for that since day one of our party's existence.

I see this as absolutely essential and I can think of a number of examples. I meet people in my riding who work for government bodies or private sector companies and who cannot work in French.

We will see how open the members here are to this. Since French does not appear to be all that important, and if this bill does not pass, we will turn to the Quebec government and suggest that it try to ensure that all federally regulated companies are subject to Bill 101.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise this morning in support of Bill C-420. I want to thank the member for his work on the bill he has introduced today in the House.

This is an opportunity for me to set the record straight on something he just said. The member for La Pointe-de-l'Île painted all federalist parties with the same brush, but the NDP is a very strong ally with respect to Quebec's claims in Ottawa. This has been our trademark for many years, since well before the 2011 orange wave. This was a focus and priority for our leader, Jack Layton.

We continue to recognize the Quebec nation. The NDP has what we call the Sherbrooke declaration, and I encourage my Bloc Québécois colleagues to read it. The Sherbrooke declaration presents our vision of Quebec within Canada as a partner with rights. The declaration also recognizes Quebec's distinctiveness. I simply wanted to correct my colleague on this.

I remind members that not only do I support Bill C-420, but many of my colleagues in the 42nd Parliament have also introduced similar measures. It goes without saying that I support this bill from my Bloc Québécois colleague and, in particular, the part that deals with anti-scab legislation.

My colleague from Jonquière introduced a similar bill, an identical one in fact. She wrote the part of Bill C-420 that refers to scabs. She very eloquently promoted this initiative to prevent the use of scabs in our country. She also wanted to provide unions with tools to defend themselves in dealing with employers who replace striking workers and violate the right to bargaining and the right to strike. The Bloc Québécois knows it can count on the support of the NDP on that point.

My colleague from Jonquière did not propose this initiative for nothing. She gave it her all. She involved many others in her work, including unions. Unfortunately, the government dismissed out of hand the idea of adopting anti-scab legislation. That is not surprising, when we consider that soon afterward, the Liberals passed special legislation forcing Canada Post workers back to work. That is no coincidence.

The Liberals never side with workers, even when they have the opportunity to do so. Instead, they side with employers, as we have seen. These are two examples that show that the Liberal government may talk a good game, but when it comes time to act, it always sides with employers. Whether they are voting against anti-scab legislation or passing back-to-work legislation to prevent strikes and collective bargaining, the Liberals always side with the employer.

The second part of the bill seeks to offer pregnant women rights similar to those enjoyed by women in Quebec who do not work for federally regulated businesses, namely the right to preventive withdrawal when they are pregnant or nursing. When their work is considered hazardous to the health of their unborn or nursing baby, women should have the right to preventive withdrawal. It goes without saying that we support such an initiative.

My colleagues from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie and Abitibi—Témiscamingue both introduced similar initiatives, which shows that we agree on this point. Not only do I support this bill, but my NDP colleagues introduced similar initiatives.

Many employers in Quebec fall under federal jurisdiction, including banks, airports, airlines and ports.

Private Members' Business

•(1115)

There are many other examples, particularly in the telecommunications sector, which employs many Quebecers. This therefore affects a lot of people. We sometimes tend to think that only a small number of people are involved. However, when we count them all up, we realize that many of our fellow citizens would fall under this law, which would improve on the rights they currently enjoy.

The other aspect of this bill governing businesses under federal jurisdiction is the application of the right to work in French in Quebec. Naturally, this is an initiative that we support. I will give an example to remind our Bloc Québécois colleagues that we support them. Our NDP colleague, the member for Trois-Rivières, introduced a similar bill to give francophones the right to work in their language in Quebec in federally regulated businesses. Unfortunately, this bill was rejected by the government in 2012, even though our colleague also fought hard for it.

Those are a few examples of the NDP's support for Quebecers, the protection of the French language and the protection of workers' rights. This shows that we can rally behind the Bloc Québécois bill.

This bill is a step in the right direction, and we hope the other parties in the House will support it. NDP members who have introduced similar initiatives know what it is like to run up against fierce opposition from both Conservative and Liberal governments. Those two parties joined forces against NDP members every time we introduced those initiatives.

I hope the Bloc Québécois's initiative will win the Conservative and Liberal support we never got. I wish the Bloc the best of luck because it will need that support to get this bill passed.

We know how the House of Commons works, how voting works. I hope the Bloc Québécois will find many Liberal and Conservative supporters. My point is that not all federal parties are the same. As a federal party, the NDP is special and unique in that it not only recognizes Quebec, but gives it the rights, powers and abilities it needs to develop its skills, its identity and its distinct character within Canada.

This is a good opportunity for me to support this bill and the workers who deserve our support now more than ever. In fact, workers all too often continue to find themselves under attack by their employers. Their rights are violated every day in the workplace. All too often, the workers whose rights are being violated by their employer have to deal with a government that does not listen to them. When it comes time to defend these workers, successive governments have sided with employers, large corporations and multinationals, who all have the ear of the Prime Minister when they knock on his door.

This was the case on a recent file that I will not name. When a multinational knocks on the Prime Minister's door, the response is quick, and tough measures are quickly put in place to help. Inappropriate pressure is even used to get things done for these corporations and multinationals. That is what is happening in the office of the current Liberal Prime Minister, who is very quick to respond to requests from multinationals and large corporations. When employees of companies like Sears or GM need help from their government, they are told to wait and that the government will

get around to them at some point. Meanwhile, when the heads of large corporations knock at the door, they get immediate assistance.

•(1120)

I congratulate my Bloc Québécois colleague. We will gladly support him, as we did in the past with our own initiatives regarding workers' rights and the French language in Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I know my friend, the parliamentary secretary for labour, is particularly looking forward to my remarks today. It is great to be back in the House.

Bill C-420 deals with a number of different issues. It is, in a certain sense, an omnibus bill dealing with various aspects of labour relations, and I thank the member for bringing it forward.

I am going to be highlighting a number of the issues in the bill and speaking to them. I will not speak about all of the issues, but I will speak to a few of them, and specifically the issues of preventive withdrawal and the ban on replacement workers.

It might not surprise members to find that the proposed ban on replacement workers is a deal breaker for us. However, there are some interesting ideas in the bill that I will speak to in the area of preventive withdrawal.

Banning replacement workers would have a significant negative impact on the economy, and particularly on remote communities, which rely on the access that small trucking companies, for example, might provide. They would be negatively impacted if there were no recourse that an employer could use in bringing supplies to those communities.

I will speak first to the issue of preventive withdrawal in the bill. This addresses the case of a pregnant woman in the workplace who, concerned about the impact on her health and safety and on the health and safety of her unborn child, wishes to withdraw from her workplace in order to avoid exposures or situations that would cause a health issue for either of them. This issue being explored in Bill C-420 is similar to a discussion that the House had, I believe on an NDP private member's bill, Bill C-345, which only dealt at that time with the issue of preventive withdrawal.

The fundamental issue at play here is that in the province of Quebec, there is the opportunity for women in this situation to access paid leave, but in the rest of the country and in the federal jurisdiction, only unpaid leave is available.

The first step is that a woman in this situation would seek reassignment. If no reassignment were available, then she would leave the workplace. In the provincially regulated area in Quebec, there is an opportunity to access paid leave that does not exist within the federally regulated workplace in Quebec or elsewhere in other jurisdictions in the country. Bill C-345 would have created an opportunity to align the federally regulated rules in the province where the work is taking place with the provincial rules that exist.

Private Members' Business

At the time of the debate on Bill C-345, Conservatives supported the bill. We share in principle the objective of making sure that women and unborn children have the maximum opportunity to be safe. We recognize the challenging situation that may emerge when people feel there is a risk to their health and safety but have concerns about whether economically they are able to withdraw from the workplace in that situation.

Bill C-345 did not pass because it was opposed by the government. When I spoke to the bill at that time, I mentioned that the bill raised a number of different issues that maybe could have been further discussed and worked out in committee.

There was a question of alignment in general between different jurisdictions. We have a federally regulated and provincially regulated labour force, depending on the sector. This can lead to a situation in which people in the same community are operating under different rules. Some are working in a federally regulated sector and some are working in a provincially regulated sector. That is a reality of the way that the system works, and maybe this causes consternation in cases in which people do not have access to the same opportunities within their communities that others do.

I pointed out at the time, of course, that there are going to be alignment issues either way. If a bill like Bill C-345 had passed, we would have had an alignment issue in which in one province the federally regulated workforce would have been treated differently from the way the federally regulated workforce would have been treated elsewhere.

● (1125)

I argued at the time, and I think it is still the case, that there are other possible ways we need to talk about supporting women in this situation. We would not want people to be in a workplace where their health and safety were threatened, certainly at a time of relative greater physical vulnerability and the vulnerability of a developing child in the womb.

These are issues that require our attention. That is why we supported Bill C-345 at the time. Those provisions are incorporated into Bill C-420. However, we are not supportive of this bill, not because of those provisions but because the issue of the proposed ban on replacement workers really is a deal breaker for us.

There are situations where employers and workers are negotiating and the negotiations break down, and that leads to a strike. Strikes involve costs for everyone involved. They involve costs for workers, who are without the opportunity to work and earn an income for the period of time of the strike. There is a cost for the employer. There is a cost for the public, which is not able, for that period of time, potentially, to access that service or to access it in the same way.

The right to strike certainly is very important. It is fundamental. It is a tool that incentivizes and pushes both sides to dialogue. The way we calibrate the rules around the use of that tool are important to ensure the greatest level of balance and the greatest incentive to dialogue. However, the proposal to completely ban the possibility of using replacement workers in any situation is, from our perspective, too extreme.

Hiring replacement workers, for most employers in most situations, is not an easy thing to do. It is not as if the possibility

to do that leads employers, in the vast majority of cases, to be totally casual about the need to come to terms with their workers through good dialogue. However, one can imagine, in the federally regulated sector, a small trucking company, for example, that has contracts and deadlines to meet and is vulnerable to going out of business if there is no alternative in the event of a work stoppage.

With respect to the impact on people who rely on those services, we can imagine a situation where remote communities rely on the work of small trucking companies and small airline companies, the people who are shipping resources in. The lack of any possibility of having replacement workers in any of those situations creates a real vulnerability for those communities in terms of getting essential resources in.

Generally speaking, when we have seen changes to the Canada Labour Code, we have sought to move forward with them in a way that reflects discussion and consensus among the different stakeholders, including the representatives of labour and the representatives of business. This recognizes the reality that there is a need for balance. We cannot, by tipping the pendulum too far the other way, create a significant disincentive around investment. If such a disincentive were created, I am concerned that it would lead to less investment in Canada and less investment in new business. The results of that would be worse for employers as well. When we have strong, growing, thriving businesses, that creates more demand for labour and puts labour in a stronger position.

In my home province of Alberta, we see a situation where the province is really booming. Labour has great opportunity to choose between different employers. Wages go up dramatically, because there is a shortage of labour. Business is demanding labour, which is driven by the strength of that economy. Because of that provision, the Conservatives have to oppose this.

Briefly, on another matter, I want to note that a number of MPs recently spoke to a young man who is on a hunger strike in Toronto to highlight violations of human rights in Turkey, violations in particular that target the Kurdish community. He described the experience of growing up in Turkey, where his ability to live freely and identify as a Kurd was denied to him, and the many problems associated with that. I want to acknowledge that important issue. It is my hope that this hunger strike will now come to an end. We encourage those who have concerns for human rights to fortify their physical strength so they can continue to be a voice for justice on this issue and I hope members will continue to highlight these human rights violations targeting Kurds and others in Turkey.

● (1130)

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am happy to join this debate on Bill C-420. I had to check my prepared text. I actually agreed with a number of points my colleague across the way made. I wanted to make sure that we had it right in the text.

Private Members' Business

I would like to use my time to speak about the current situation and where we are with the three prominent issues that arise from this piece of legislation: the use of replacement workers, the situation for pregnant and nursing employees, and the Charter of the French Language in Quebec. Through my comments I hope I will be able to share with the chamber and with colleagues the concerns the government has with this piece of legislation.

Let us start with replacement workers. The Canada Labour Code balances a union's right to strike with an employer's right to attempt to continue operating despite a work stoppage. The current provisions in part 1 of the code already limit the use of replacement workers. Indeed, federally regulated employers cannot use replacement workers to undermine a union's representational capacity. In fact, federally regulated private sector employers rarely use replacement workers. More often, management, supervisors and other non-bargaining personnel are reassigned to take the place of striking workers.

The current provisions in the code related to replacement workers are the result of a broad and comprehensive review that represents a carefully crafted compromise between the interests of employers and the interests of trade unions that could not be achieved through a private member's bill or through the private member's bill process.

In the past, both labour and employer organizations have been highly critical of changes being made to federal labour relations legislation through the use of private member's bills without prior consultation with all stakeholders.

The Canadian Labour Congress has said in the past:

...we urge the federal government to stop the introduction of one-off changes to the Canada Labour Code. Amendments should not be made through private members' bills. They should be made with concerted pre-legislative consultation that engages employers, unions and government.

Members who were in the House at the time will remember that one of the first actions our government took was to repeal the Conservative private member's bills Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, which upset the balance of rights and responsibilities between federally regulated employers and unions.

Good labour relations are a key element of an economic system, and indeed, of the prosperity of this country. If legislative changes are to be considered for part 1 of the code, let us do it the right way, through real and meaningful consultation and engagement with unions, employers and all stakeholders.

The current provision in the code was achieved through a thorough and meaningful tripartite process. It strikes a balance between the interests of unions and the interests of employers. It allows each side to exercise pressure on the other. If passed, Bill C-420 could upset that balance.

Regarding pregnant and nursing employees, the code currently contains provisions that give a pregnant or nursing employee the right to ask to be reassigned or to have her job modified, without loss of pay or benefits, if there is a risk to her health or the health of the fetus or the child. If a reassignment is not possible, the woman may take a leave of absence for the duration of that risk.

Also, an employee may be entitled to leave with pay to obtain a medical certificate or while waiting for her employer to respond to a

reassignment request. Any additional leave is without pay. However, the employee may be entitled to benefits under an insurance plan or a sick leave program provided by the employer or to benefits through the employment insurance program.

• (1135)

As mentioned by my colleague across the way, the fact is that currently only Quebec specifically offers preventative withdrawal job protection with wage replacement for pregnant and nursing women.

If passed, Bill C-420 would put pressure on provinces and territories that do not have preventative withdrawal provisions. Moreover, our government is already supporting another related private member's bill, Bill C-243, an act respecting the development of a national maternity assistance program strategy, which was passed in the House June 14, 2017, and is currently being studied by the other place.

The purpose of Bill C-243 is to consult on the development and implementation of a national maternity assistance program strategy. The objective is to support women who are unable to work due to pregnancy and whose employer is unable to accommodate them by providing reassignment. If Bill C-243 passes, it would require consultations with provincial and territorial governments and other stakeholders. It is reasonable to believe that the results of such consultations would have an impact on the mechanism proposed in Bill C-420.

Finally, I will speak about the Charter of the French Language in Quebec. In 1982, the Constitution Act enshrined English and French as Canada's official languages. It also provided that they have equality of status in all institutions of Parliament and of the Government of Canada.

Two separate statutes regulate the language of work in Quebec: the Charter of the French Language, enacted 1997, and federally, the Official Languages Act, enacted in 1969 and revised in 1988.

While the government is sensitive to the preference of francophone Quebecers to work in French, there is little documented evidence that francophones face difficulties working in French in federally regulated private enterprises in Quebec. In fact, according to the 2016 census in Quebec, an increasing number of workers whose mother tongue is English or another language use French as their main language at work or equally with English. About 48% of workers whose mother tongue is another language primarily used French at work in 2016. That is compared to 46.5% in 2006. Similarly, about 25% of workers whose mother tongue is English mainly used French at work in 2016, compared to 23% in 2006. That is an increase in both measurements. Moreover, the federal labour program has never received a complaint from a federally regulated private sector employee in Quebec concerning an inability to work in French. Indeed, in 2013, a government report concluded that these employees are generally able to work in French in their workplaces.

Private Members' Business

One last thing I must point out is that corporations active in Quebec, including those incorporated under the Canada Business Corporations Act, are already required, under provincial law, to comply with the Charter of the French Language, which includes having a French name when registering to carry on business in Quebec.

There we have it: Canada's current position when it comes to replacement workers, pregnant and nursing employees and the Charter of the French Language in Quebec. Now that members can see the full picture, they can understand why the government cannot support Bill C-420.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will be very brief, but I just want to give a few real-life examples of the effects of my colleague's bill.

First of all, my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île gave a great presentation on the French language. The only thing he may have left out, something I think my Liberal colleague would be interested to hear, is that he got a visit from a worker who has a job on the West Island of Montreal. This worker had exhausted all his options and was still unable to work in French. This bill would fix that problem.

The bill also addresses the issue of what is known as anti-scab legislation in Quebec. The House may recall that on December 1, 2010, a hotel in Thetford Mines that was barred from hiring replacement or volunteer workers came to an agreement with its employees. That is another example of how my colleague's bill would have a positive impact. The Bloc Québécois has introduced anti-scab legislation many times. I believe that, on several occasions, the bill even reached third reading. It eventually failed because the Liberals voted against it. A few Liberal members did vote in favour of such a bill at the time, including Denis Coderre, Pablo Rodriguez and Marcel Proulx.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I wish to remind the member that she must not refer to members of the House by name, but rather by riding.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Madam Speaker, I just realized it when I saw you rising.

There have been dozens of votes on this issue, but the House of Commons has never managed to pass a bill such as this. Some sectors, for example telecommunications, are under federal jurisdiction. Quebec workers with jobs in this sector are not protected by anti-scab legislation. Thus, there are two classes of workers in Quebec: those protected by this type of law and those who are not. The bill sponsored by my colleague from Mirabel would ensure that everyone has the same rights.

My last remarks will be about preventive withdrawal. On international women's rights day, I held a meeting in my riding where we discussed women's rights, which vary depending on whether the job is in an area under federal or provincial jurisdiction in Quebec. Women were surprised to learn that they do not all have the same rights in Quebec. Women in federally regulated workplaces including, of course, the federal government and crown corporations, do not have the right to preventive withdrawal. This means all

women who work for the federal government and its departments. There are also certain organizations that fall under a department, such as Bell Canada and national Canadian banks. There are several of them. In Quebec, women such as those I mentioned earlier do not all have the same rights. The bill introduced by my colleague would ensure that everyone in Quebec would have the same rights.

• (1145)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Mirabel has a five-minute right of reply.

Mr. Simon Marcil (Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, two weeks ago, on the International Day of La Francophonie, the parties here were all so proud of the French language. We were treated to solemn declarations, videos and Internet memes. We even heard Yves Duteil's lyrics quoted in the House of Commons. I could not believe my ears. I am not making this up. One would have thought Camille Laurin had been resurrected and elected to sit here in Ottawa.

Just 24 hours later, however, the Liberals and Conservatives were hard at work preventing hundreds of thousands of Quebeckers from doing their jobs in their preferred language, French. The theatrics should come as no surprise. Everyone here in Ottawa is quick to stand up for French, except when the time comes to bring in meaningful measures that make a difference in the real world. The major Canadian political parties want to vote down Bill C-420, which I am honoured to have introduced on behalf of the Bloc Québécois. It has one simple objective: to bring the federal government into the 21st century. With this bill, we are defending the rights of all workers in Quebec to work in our common language, French, Quebec's only official language.

To the other parties, allowing Quebeckers to work in French in Quebec is too much to ask. To the government it is even shameful. The Liberals told us in the House that French at work in Quebec was shameful. Bill C-420 establishes that it was not only not shameful, but a rather logical societal choice for workers in Quebec to work in the language of Quebec on Quebec soil. Bill C-420 also seeks to protect workers' freedom of expression by preventing federally regulated companies from using replacement workers. If the government wants to talk about something shameful, I would say that it is not French in the workplace, but rather the use of scabs during disputes, and with Ottawa's blessing, to boot.

The 1950s are long gone and the Bloc Québécois wants to stop the use of scabs at the federal level, but the Canadian parties are opposed to this, as usual. It is no surprise to see the Conservatives stuck in the past, since they are all about staying in the past. I was sure that earlier my Conservative colleague was going to confidently announce that the Earth is flat. However, the Liberals' insistence on maintaining working conditions that are straight out of the last century says a lot about the way Canadians view labour relations. Clearly, the people who want to move Quebec forward cannot expect much from the House of Commons.

Speaking of being firmly stuck in the past, I must also talk about how the federal government is lagging behind on gender equality, which means that Quebec women are discriminated against when they must use the preventive withdrawal program. Bill C-420 will ensure that the pregnant women who need this program can do what is in the best interests of their health and their baby's health without being penalized.

Ottawa penalizes Quebec women who work in federally regulated workplaces. They are the only ones who cannot avail themselves of Quebec's parental leave plan, even though they work in Quebec. All Quebec women are entitled to at least 90% of their salary in the event of preventive withdrawal, except federally regulated employees. These women receive just 55% of their salary, which is essentially half. Furthermore, they are not eligible for employment insurance. Two-thirds of women overall do not even have access to the program.

Women should be encouraged to protect their safety and that of their babies, not penalized for it. Nevertheless, my colleagues from other parties are going to vote for the opposite, as usual. That is on them. I know that the NDP proposed similar amendments and bills, but I am talking about the Conservatives and the Liberals. It is always the same thing with them in any case. Perhaps we should arrange for their women voters to get wind of this.

In short, the Liberals and the Conservatives are, as usual, going to vote against the following three principles: workers' language rights, their right to strike and the rights of women workers. The fact is that Quebecers are not getting what they need from Ottawa. They are not getting what they need from elected officials who are out of touch with the reality in Quebec.

The Bloc Québécois believes that Quebec has everything to gain by voting for representatives who understand Quebec and who understand that, in Quebec, we take the side of workers, not the side of employers. We always come down on the side of French, particularly when it requires political courage. That is what Quebecers want. They want elected officials who speak for the people in the federal Parliament, not officials who speak for Parliament to the people.

• (1150)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): 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 Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): In my opinion the nays have it.

Speaker's Ruling

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, April 3, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

[*English*]

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will now suspend until noon.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:52 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 p.m.)

* * *

• (1200)

POINTS OF ORDER

FEBRUARY 25 MEETING OF STANDING COMMITTEE ON CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now ready to rule on the point of order raised on February 28, 2019, by the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill concerning events that occurred at meetings of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on February 25 and 27, 2019.

I want to thank the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill for having raised the matter and the member for Don Valley West for his comments.

In her intervention, the member for Calgary Nose Hill explained the circumstances that gave rise to her point of order. That is, on February 25, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration was debating a motion when the chair of the committee suspended the meeting to allow members to vote in the House, indicating at the time that the meeting would resume after the vote. However, as the member stated, when they returned, they "waited [for] some time for the quorum to be met, which never occurred." The chair then left the room without either resuming or adjourning the meeting. Consequently, in response to a point of order raised at their next meeting, the chair confirmed that the meeting had indeed been adjourned. Upon appeal, that decision was upheld.

Contending that the adjournment was a unilateral and prohibited decision of the committee chair, the member for Calgary Nose Hill made it clear that the premise of her objections was twofold. That is, committees do not have any authority to act beyond the powers granted to them by the House and, specifically, they cannot circumvent, even indirectly, Standing Order 116(2).

[*Translation*]

To answer these objections, and in fact determine the authority of the Speaker in this matter, a comprehensive understanding of not only the words found in Standing Order 116(2) but also of its scope and applicability is important, particularly since this is the first instance in which this Standing Order has been invoked.

Standing Order 116(2) states:

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(a) Unless a time limit has been adopted by the committee or by the House, the Chair of a standing, special or legislative committee may not bring a debate to an end while there are members present who still wish to participate. A decision of the Chair in this regard may not be subject to an appeal to the committee.

(b) A violation of paragraph (a) of this section may be brought to the attention of the Speaker by any Member and the Speaker shall have the power to rule on the matter. If, in the opinion of the Speaker, such a violation has occurred, the Speaker may order that all subsequent proceedings in relation to the said violation be nullified.

[English]

While the language of this rule is unambiguous, the Chair must, as always, understand and consider carefully the meaning, and even intention, behind the words. In other words, what was the purpose of adding this standing order to our rules or what new expectations or parameters does it bring? Essentially, it seems to the Chair that this new rule is intended to safeguard debate in committee from a procedural hijacking, so to speak, that would permanently end debate on a motion.

Before its introduction, members could have, for example, forced a debate on a debatable motion by moving the previous question, which is not procedurally permissible in committee, thus requiring committee chairs to rule it out of order. A challenge of such a ruling could have resulted in its being overturned, thereby forcing the chair to put an end to debate and depriving members of the opportunity to further deliberate on a question.

● (1205)

[Translation]

At the very core of this new provision, then, stands the desire to allow committee members to participate fully in their deliberations without being unduly stopped from debating matters until their natural conclusion. Defence of this mattered to the extent that it was, in fact, fortified with a recourse, and a new authority for the Speaker, in the event of a clear violation.

However, this is not to be interpreted as being applicable in all instances of debate ending in committee. For instance, on occasions when a committee adjourns before deliberations are concluded or agrees to a motion to adjourn debate on a question, a permanent end to the debate is not triggered in the matter outlined in Standing Order 116(2); rather, debate on the matter is still permissible and may come back before the committee at a future date to be determined by either the chair or the committee.

[English]

To answer whether the matter now before the House is one which Standing Order 116(2) was intended to address, as Speaker, I have scrutinized the evidence and minutes of the February 25 and 27 meetings of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

It is my view that the manner in which the meeting of February 25 was adjourned was procedurally sound as it was due to a lack of quorum, a fact avowed by the member for Calgary Nose Hill. This is a pivotal factor since the debate on the motion did not end permanently in consequence. In fact, the motion being debated at the time by the committee remains unresolved and may be taken up again at a later date. Accordingly, Standing Order 116(2) does not apply in these circumstances and, as Speaker, I am unable to intervene as provided for in this new standing order.

The remaining question then is whether the committee's proceedings strayed outside the powers granted to it by the House, the sole body able to grant them. The fact that committees are generally the masters of their proceedings is in no way diminished by Standing Order 116(2). Consequently, barring a report from a committee, the Speaker will not usually intervene in committee matters. From the evidence presented in this instance, the Chair is unable to conclude that the circumstances are exceptional enough to warrant an intervention, without the House having been seized of the matter by way of a report from the committee, as is the usual practice.

[Translation]

I thank all hon. members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed from March 19 consideration of the motion that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the cover-up budget. Now of course the Liberal government is heading into an election. I hear applause from across the way, but I am not sure they will be applauding after they get the verdict of the people. A “verdict” is an appropriate term, though, because of course we are dealing with a very serious set of allegations and apparent corruption emanating from the SNC-Lavalin scandal.

I call it the cover-up budget because the government has decided to use the old Kathleen Wynne three-step. Step one is a massive scandal. Step two is massive deficit spending to distract from it, and step three is massive tax increases after the election to pay for it all. We know that the Kathleen Wynne three-step was designed by none other than Gerald Butts, the former PMO puppet master who recently resigned in disgrace over the SNC-Lavalin scandal.

Going into this budget, the government was obviously overtaken by the public frenzy around revelations that the Prime Minister interfered in a criminal trial to help a Liberal-linked company get off charges. The Liberal government splashed \$41 billion of new spending around, in order to distract from it all. The Liberals will be quick to point out that \$41 billion is just if one uses cash accounting. We can use accrual accounting and it works out to \$23 billion.

However, the bottom line is this. The Prime Minister has broken his promise of balancing the budget this year. He is planning, in fact, to add even more to the national deficit next year. All of this is part of a scheme to spray billions of dollars at Canadian voters to distract them from the scandal before the election and then raise their taxes to pay for it after the election.

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In order to understand the cover-up budget, one needs to understand the scandal that it attempts to hide. Let me turn my attention now to that. Before I do, though, I will point out that we are returning full circle because this scandal started with the last budget. The government introduced budget 2018, which made vague reference to addressing corporate crime. It seemed to be rather benign, possibly even something that all parties could support. Everyone is against corporate crime after all, or so we thought.

Then when we were sitting in a finance committee meeting, nearing midnight, going through the nearly 500 pages of omnibus budget legislation that flowed out of the 2018 budget, we stumbled on something that surprised us. It was an amendment to the Criminal Code. Everyone in the room was shocked, including the Liberals.

The Liberal member for Hull—Aylmer looked at it and said that it did not smell right and looked like we were giving a “slap on the wrist” to large-scale corporate criminals. I could paraphrase a colourful quote. He said, “if I steal \$10, I’m in trouble, but if I steal \$10 million, I can work this out”. That was the impression he got from amendments the finance minister introduced to the Criminal Code in his budget.

The chairman of the committee, a lifelong Liberal and a devoted partisan member, said on the record that he thought it was inappropriate that such an amendment to the Criminal Code would find its way into a budget bill and that we would discuss changes to criminal penalties at the finance committee rather than at the justice committee where the Criminal Code is normally debated and addressed.

Throughout all of this debate, the question mark that kept appearing in everybody’s mind was who was asking for this. Why were they trying to amend the Criminal Code in the budget? Who is behind this change?

● (1210)

Obviously, somebody must want it, or the government would not have gone through so much trouble to draft such an amendment. We would find out later on exactly who was driving this change. It was SNC-Lavalin.

A story appeared in February, in *The Globe and Mail*, saying that the Prime Minister and his team had personally and politically interfered with the former attorney general in order to get her to extend a special deal to SNC-Lavalin that would shelve the charges of fraud and bribery in order to allow the company to go on with business as usual. Budget 2018 had made that possible. It had created something called deferred prosecution agreements. Essentially, these agreements allow companies to avoid trial or prosecution, and even conviction, if they fess up, apologize, pay a fine and promise not to do it again.

Of course, if a homeless guy is charged with stealing a loaf of bread, he has no similar approach he can take. He cannot simply knock on the Prime Minister’s door and ask if he would mind calling the Attorney General, who will call a Crown attorney and agree to set aside the charges as long as the guy gives back the bread and promises not to steal it again. That does not exist for other people. However, the Liberal government has created this special deal

available to powerful corporate criminals in cases, apparently, like this one.

The amendment to the Criminal Code gave very specific criteria against which any corporation’s desire to have such a deal must be judged. Canada’s top prosecutor, known as the director of public prosecutions, considered SNC-Lavalin’s request for such a deal against the criteria in the Criminal Code and the facts of the case. She concluded that SNC-Lavalin did not qualify for a deferred prosecution agreement.

Some of the factors she would have considered are the following. Did the company voluntarily tell authorities of its crimes? The answer is no. The company was caught when one of its officials was charged in Switzerland and ultimately found guilty of crimes in that country. That was what led authorities in Canada to learn that the crime had happened, not a voluntary disclosure from corporate executives to the Canadian government. Second is the severity of the offence. Was this a minor offence, an oversight or a small failing that could be treated with a minor penalty? The answer to that is no.

Let me turn my attention now to that particular issue. There has been this racist undertone to the story. People have said, sure, SNC-Lavalin might have bought prostitutes and other gifts for the Gadhafis. Sure, the Gadhafis got free yachts, but that is just the way things are done in those countries over there. People should just understand that if Canadian businesses are going to do commerce abroad, this is the kind of muck they are going to have to get into. So goes the argument.

This case is not just about the sordid examples of bribery, as disgusting as those are. It is also about fraud, which is the other allegation the company faces in Canadian courts in this particular matter, fraud of the Libyan people in amounts totalling \$130 million. I do not know about you, Madam Speaker, but I think that stealing from poor people is a pretty miserable way to make money, and our justice system should not treat such crimes as minor affairs because “that is just the way things are done over there”.

● (1215)

The reason so many of these countries are so poor is precisely because of such parasitical corruption that drains the national wealth, empties the pockets of taxpaying citizens in those countries without giving them anything in return, forces them to pay every time they want to go about their business and live their daily lives, and creates a massive imbalance of power in favour of those who have money to pay bribes and against those who do not.

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To those people who say that this is just the way things are done over there, we should never accept that this is the way things are done. That is why we signed on to international conventions against fraud and corruption, because we wanted to put an end to those practices so that the people in countries like Libya could turn their destinies around and build prosperous societies based on the honest and legal flow of commerce. As long as wealthy western corporations believe they can go with impunity into poor countries and bribe the leaders to steal from the people, those people will always live in poverty, and that poverty will be partly our fault if we are complicit in it or if we fail to punish those who carry it out.

The reason we have international conventions is that the traditional practice of many corporations was to go in, pillage and plunder, and then leave before local authorities could prosecute them, going back to western countries, where they continued to operate with impunity. In other words, if companies like SNC-Lavalin are not prosecuted over here, they will continue to carry out the alleged crimes we witnessed in this case over and over again, and countless people in the poorest countries in the world will forever pay the price.

We, as Conservatives, do not accept that this is the way business is done. We will ensure that while Canadian businesses should have the legitimate right to do well by doing good, to trade with the world, and to grow and prosper, they shall never make a buck by stealing from the world's poor.

Let me go into the specifics of the allegations of fraud and bribery that SNC faces in Canadian courts today, the specifics of the case that the Prime Minister tried to set aside by pressuring his former attorney general to sign a special deal with that company. I will go through it, starting with a quote by Global News:

In 2015, the RCMP charged SNC-Lavalin, along with its international division, with corruption and fraud in relation with their business dealings in Libya.

The RCMP said officials at the company attempted to bribe several public officials in the country, including dictator Moammar Gadhafi, as well as other businesses in Libya.

RCMP officials said SNC-Lavalin also lied to Libyan companies to defraud them of nearly \$130 million.

The Financial Post wrote:

SNC and its subsidiaries SNC-Lavalin Construction Inc. and SNC-Lavalin International Inc. are also alleged to have defrauded various Libyan public agencies of approximately \$129.8 million.

I quote further from the Financial Post:

According to police, Ben Aissa established a scheme in which two companies, Duvel Securities and Dinova International, billed SNC roughly \$127 million for helping the firm win dozens of major contracts in Libya during the 2000s. In fact, Swiss and Canadian police say, Duvel and Dinova were shell companies controlled by Ben Aissa. The money—including US\$1.5 million spent on a yacht for Saadi Gaddafi—was used to bribe Libyan officials and pad the bank accounts of Ben Aissa and Mr. Bebawi, who left SNC in 2006.

● (1220)

I quote from Global News, again:

In Switzerland, an ex-senior employee from SNC-Lavalin pleaded guilty to fraud, corruption and money laundering in relation to his business in Libya in 2014—before the RCMP charges. Riadh Ben Aissa acknowledged in court that he bribed Saadi Gadhafi, son of Libya's late dictator Moammar Gadhafi, so SNC could win contracts.

I quote from the National Post:

Receipts gathered during an investigation of a former SNC-Lavalin executive show \$30,000 in payments to Saadi Gadhafi for sexual services in Canada... Transactions they wrote in as “companion services” in their expense reports would cost between \$600 and \$7,500 each. Close to \$10,000 in services went to a single escort service in Vancouver. Other payments went to a Montreal strip club and covered events at the Air Canada Centre in Toronto, such as box seats for a Spice Girls concert.

It is very easy to dismiss some of this salacious bribery as just part of a broader soap opera, that obviously the participants in this behaviour might be morally corrupt themselves, but at the end of the day some will ask, “What is the overall problem that we are trying to address?”

I would bring attention back to the earlier excerpts that I read, and I am going to read it again. The reason for all this bribery was so that SNC could defraud various Libyan public agencies of \$130 million. In other words, they delighted the pleasures of top Gadhafi family members as a means to an end, and the end, of course, was to steal \$130 million from some of the poorest people in the world.

Let us all agree never again to refer to these alleged crimes as victimless crimes. They are not victimless crimes. There are people living in squalor in other parts of the world because crimes like this take place.

I list all of that chronology in order to address the criteria in the deferred prosecutions section of the Criminal Code, which says that such agreements will be available only when the severity of the crime is limited. In other words, if it is not a serious crime, if it was a mistake with limited consequences and minimal damage to any victims, the government is then entitled to enter into a negotiation with an accused corporate criminal in order to resolve it through a deferred public prosecution agreement.

Based on what I have just read to you, Madam Speaker, I think you will agree that this was not a small, petty crime. This was a serious, egregious and systematically executed crime carried out against the Libyan people. Therefore, on that basis, SNC did not qualify for a deferred prosecution agreement, if we are reading the act as it is written.

The next criterion in the act that determines whether the top prosecutor should enter into negotiations with an alleged corporate criminal for a deferred prosecution agreement asks the prosecutor to consider whether this was an isolated incident.

● (1225)

I ask, was this behaviour by SNC-Lavalin an isolated affair, or was it part of a pattern of behaviour? Was it just a few rotten apples in a faraway land who did some dirty dealings and had no link back to Canada? Well, obviously, the answer is no.

While these charges I am about to read have nothing to do with the deferred prosecution agreement the Prime Minister sought, they do speak to the Criminal Code criteria on whether or not the company has a systematic history of corruption or whether this was an isolated case. Again, I read from Global News, which said:

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...three top executives were also charged with bribery in relation to the McGill University Health Centre. Former CEO Pierre Duhaime, along with McGill officials, pleaded guilty in the case.

A company that tries to rob people in faraway lands might just do the same back here at home. In other words, those people who comfort themselves by saying “Sure, they're ripping off other people, but that doesn't cost us any money” had better actually check the facts, because from a rotten tree comes nothing but rotten fruit, and we have paid the price here in Canada for that corruption, as evidenced by the guilty plea of the company's former CEO. This is not a junior intern who stole a candy bar; this is the top official in the entire company.

Again, Global News stated that:

Quebec prosecutors are working with the RCMP on the possibility of new criminal charges against SNC-Lavalin tied to a contract to refurbish Montreal's Jacques Cartier Bridge, court documents show.

Here we have it again: more corruption involving major Canadian infrastructure projects. Of course, the state of our dilapidated bridges in many parts of this country is well known. In Montreal, it is especially the case, and when the people of Quebec and Montreal suffer the consequences when corruption by companies like this descends upon major projects that affect their daily commute demonstrates that corruption does not come without a cost.

Global News continued:

In court documents, the RCMP lays out a bribery scheme involving a \$127-million Jacques Cartier Bridge contract in the early 2000s. Former federal official Michel Fournier pleaded guilty in 2017 to accepting more than \$2.3 million in payments from SNC-Lavalin in connection with the project.

Again, we see that this corruption does not have borders, that we are not immune from the effects of a company that decides it is going to buy its way to public contracts rather than earn those contracts on merit.

Further, Global News wrote that:

In 2011, an SNC employee whose job was to facilitate travel of SNC employees in and out of Libya was arrested in Mexico and accused of attempting to smuggle Gadhafi's son and family out of the country. The employee was eventually released from jail and not charged in Canada.

As well, the Global News article stated:

The company was also banned from bidding on projects by the World Bank for 10 years over alleged misconduct during a bridge construction contract in Panama.

Now we are in Panama. We have gone from Libya to Montreal and now to Panama.

The article continues:

During an investigation from CBC and the Globe and Mail, it was alleged there was an internal accounting code for bribes.

Let us remember that I said one of the criteria for getting access to a deferred prosecution agreement is that the alleged corporate criminal had no other track record of corruption, that the alleged incident was an isolated one and that it was completely out of character. All of us agree that the justice system should take that into consideration as a mitigating factor.

Indeed, we all know stories of a youngster who makes a one-time mistake that is completely out of character. The justice system looks at the person and says that this is not who the person is and

administers a punishment that allows for the very quick restoration of that person as a member of society.

● (1230)

That is why we have proportionality in the system and that is why deferred prosecution agreements are supposed to be judged on the basis of whether the company in question engaged in an isolated incident or whether it was systematically part of the company's overall character. That excerpt answers the question. Not only were they engaging in bribery, but they had also developed an internal accounting code for it.

Imagine the trouble we would have to go through, the participation we would have to have from various members of the accounting system, in order to develop a whole code. It is not just corrupt activity; it is then corrupt coding in order to process that activity. A code would be a system and system is the root of systematic. This is systematic corruption, and any government that would attempt to give a systematically corrupt company the ability to avoid prosecution has to answer for its own ethics in the process.

It is interesting that this attempt was made by the government across the way, because Liberals know something about SNC's corruption. They participated in it. According to the Commissioner of Canada Elections, SNC-Lavalin gave approximately \$100,000 of illegal donations to the Liberal Party. The commissioner, for reasons that are unknown to me and that I still cannot understand, decided not to pursue the allegations through a full criminal conviction but instead signed an agreement, basically a compliance agreement.

In that agreement, the company admits not only that it flowed \$100,000 to the Liberal Party but that it did so in a manner that was absolutely systematic, almost on an industrial scale. It was having employees manufacture phony expense claims and was giving out phony bonuses. It then communicated to employees that they had to then take the money they were receiving fallaciously and hand it over to the Liberal Party in the form of \$100,000 in donations.

We all know the donation limits at the time were about \$1,200. In other words, no person could give more than about \$1,200 per year and no company could give any donation at all. Unions and corporations were and are banned. The executives created a bunch of phony bonuses and a bunch of phony expense claims, with phony receipts, and then SNC executives would then flow that money to the Liberal Party.

That is systematic, premeditated, carefully planned out corruption. Once again, with the Liberal government in power, there was no prosecution of the offence. It was simply signed off by the elections commissioner as a compliance agreement. The money was returned and they were allowed to go on without any consequence.

It seems that wherever SNC and the Liberals interact, there is a special deal. At the City of Ottawa, the company has been given the contract to extend the transit system to the south end of town, a project I strongly support and which I championed. The company did not apparently meet the technical requirements that are necessary, even though some of their competitors did, but somehow the company won the contract anyway.

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My point in raising all of these examples is to demonstrate that contrary to the requirement that deferred prosecution agreements should only be made available to companies for whom the alleged offence is an isolated incident, SNC-Lavalin has shown systematic and repetitive acts of corruption, most of them related to fraud and bribery. In other words, the director of public prosecutions was absolutely right to refuse the company such an agreement.

• (1235)

However, that was not good enough for the Prime Minister. He introduced an amendment to the Criminal Code through his omnibus budget specifically so he could help SNC-Lavalin. This company had lobbyists swarming all over Parliament Hill. It had made direct contact with top officials in the government. The chairman of SNC-Lavalin, Kevin Lynch, a former clerk, called the present-day clerk. There were dozens of registered lobbying interactions between top company officials or other lobbyists and high-level members of the Liberal government.

The Prime Minister said he was going to get it done one way or the other for this company. When he learned, presumably in early September, that the top prosecutor had informed the company that it would not be availed such a special deal, he then thought it was not a problem, he would call the former attorney general, she would overturn the prosecutor, there would be a deal for SNC-Lavalin and we would get back to business as usual. That was the plan.

In fairness, that is how things have worked for SNC for a very long time. The Prime Minister had every reason to think that would work. However, he encountered a problem that he did not expect to find in his own cabinet, a person with principle, someone who understood the law and viewed it as her job to respect the law. The Prime Minister assumed that if he made clear to her the political imperative, she would find a way to cast the law aside and overturn the top prosecutor in the land to offer a special deal to SNC-Lavalin in its \$130-million fraud and bribery case. She said no. She looked at the act and said that clearly the company did not qualify for a deferred prosecution agreement. Furthermore, it would literally be unprecedented for an attorney general to overturn a decision of the independent prosecutor and she said she would not do it.

She thought that would be the end of the story. Ultimately, it should have been. The government should have said that it had a very qualified attorney general, who has experience as a prosecutor and a meticulous understanding of the law, who had looked at the act and concluded that the top prosecutor was right and the company does not deserve a deal. That is where the story for the political actors ends and where the independent judicial process carries on.

Before I go any further, for the listeners out there who might not be aware of how strict the separation between politics and the courts is, let me give them a few examples.

The former Quebec premier, Jean Charest, was a member of this House and a minister in the Mulroney government. He very innocently called a judge one day about a case. There was no corrupt intent. He simply called because he thought he was advancing the public interest. Do members know what happened to him? He resigned. He was done.

In the previous Conservative government, former minister John Duncan received some input from a constituent about a case that was before a quasi-judicial board. He had no personal interest in it. The constituent was raising a legitimate grievance about how he had been treated in the process. As an MP, he thought he would call the quasi-judicial board and make an intervention to help his constituent. Again, he had pure motives and a legitimate desire to help a fellow Canadian. There was nothing untoward or corrupt. Do members know what happened to him? He resigned. Why? Because we, in this country, accept a strict division between judicial bodies and political bodies.

• (1240)

It is absolutely strict. It is so strict that everything we say in the House of Commons is exempt from being admitted in a court of law against the people who spoke it. The principle, of course, is that just as politicians do not interfere in the courtroom, judges do not interfere in the House of Commons. There is a strict separation.

I provide this as background so that when we describe, as I am about to do, the relentless effort by the Prime Minister and his team to interfere with a criminal court proceeding, everyone is aware of just how rare and inappropriate this is. If it is a resigning offence for a minister in the previous government to call a quasi-judicial body about a constituent's concern, surely it is a resigning offence for the Prime Minister of Canada to carry out a consistent and sustained campaign of interference with his Attorney General to stop a \$130-million fraud and bribery case from going ahead. However, that is exactly what he did.

I am going to relay the story of his interference not from the vantage point of a Conservative or a New Democrat or even of an angry anti-Liberal journalist, if there is such a thing, but from the vantage point of Liberals themselves. Remember, all of the allegations in this scandal come from the Prime Minister's cabinet. This is what makes the scandal so exceptional. Normally governments are criticized or accused of things by members of the opposition or the media. In this case, the allegations all come from people the Prime Minister thought enough of to put them in charge of major government departments.

What did these people say? The former attorney general, someone the Prime Minister entrusted with the top law office of the land and eventually entrusted with the care of our veterans, said that the Prime Minister and his team carried out "sustained" and "consistent" interference, that she experienced "veiled threats", that she was hounded and that the entire campaign reminded her of the "Saturday night massacre", a reference to Richard Nixon's mass firings in the Watergate scandal. Again, to the Liberal MPs rolling their eyes on the other side of the House, these are not hyperbolic allegations from the official opposition; they are words from the Liberals' own former attorney general.

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Of course, as the Prime Minister said, she could not possibly be believed. His senior staff members have lined up to undermine her credibility and suggest that she was just angry because she lost her “dream job”, as Gerald Butts called it. The only problem, which is a big problem, is that she kept records of what happened. She kept notes, texts, and other contemporaneous documents, and of course, she has audio recordings to prove it all.

Why would she have recorded a conversation with the Prime Minister's top public servant on this matter? It is because in September, October and November, she had been hounded—

● (1245)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader has a point of order.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect that if you were to go over the last half an hour of debate from the member opposite, you will find that we have been very patient. Today's debate is about budget 2019. I would ask that the member opposite, at least every so often, use the word “budget”, so that people who are watching are aware that this is a budget debate.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I appreciate the point of order. The hon. parliamentary secretary is well aware that there is some latitude during debates in the House, and I am sure that the hon. member for Carleton will make sure his speech addresses the budget bill.

The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, that was a strange intervention from the deputy House leader of the Liberal Party. He is now claiming that deferred prosecution agreements have nothing to do with budget policy. That is funny. Why, on God's green earth, did the Liberals put it in the budget? They put it in the budget, so they have suggested it is a budget matter. Therefore, we are left with nothing more than to debate it within the context of the budget.

It is funny that this is the second time that members of the government have become confused by what they put in their own budget. I was recently at the finance committee and asked questions about deferred prosecution agreements of finance officials. I wanted to know why the finance minister was meeting with top executives and lobbyists from SNC-Lavalin in the weeks following the director of public prosecution's decision not to extend a DPA to the company. All of a sudden, the chair of the finance committee slammed down his gavel and said that this was not relevant and had nothing to do with finance. I said that was funny because the deferred prosecution agreements were amended into the Criminal Code through legislation in the budget that was passed by the finance committee. The government used an omnibus budget bill to introduce this package of special deals for corporate criminals, and that is exactly why we are debating it today when the budget is before the House of Commons.

Let me return to the issue of the audiotape. The employment minister said over the weekend that it was unethical for her former cabinet colleague, the former attorney general, to tape-record a conversation with the Clerk of the Privy Council. As the former attorney general wrote herself in documents released Friday, it would otherwise have been inappropriate but for the extraordinary

circumstances with which she was faced. She had been mercilessly hounded in September, October, November and almost all of December when she received a call from the top public servant and knew it was trouble. She knew exactly what was going to happen on that call, because she and her staff had seen it again and again, 20 different times, which she had documented and proven occurred.

Members of the Prime Minister's inner circle, plus the Prime Minister himself, had interfered with this case, and she knew, based on all of their duplicity and dishonesty with which they approached her again and again, that if she did not have evidence of what happened, they would lie and deny. She was absolutely right, because that is exactly what they have since done. The problem is that they picked the wrong person. They did not realize she would keep evidence. They assumed that Canadians would never know the truth, that they would deny her accounts and everyone would say, “Well, he said, she said, who knows, let us just throw up our hands and move on.” That is not possible when someone is as punctilious and specific as the former attorney general.

Let us consider some of the contradictions that have now been exposed since the release of her documentation. First, when the story broke on the front page of *The Globe and Mail* in February that the Prime Minister and his team had pressured the former attorney general to offer the company a deferred prosecution agreement, the Prime Minister's response was that the story was false, strictly false, that was it, that was all. Liberals would go on to make specific denials in the 48 hours to 72 hours that followed, saying that the Prime Minister's team neither interfered with nor pressured the former attorney general in the case. That story did not last long, did it?

● (1250)

Later on, the Prime Minister's clerk was forced to go before a committee, where he admitted that there was pressure. He said that there was pressure but that pressure was normal, because it is a high-pressure job. That contradicts the very specific denial that the Prime Minister and his team had uttered.

There was the first change of story.

Then the Prime Minister famously said that if the former attorney general or anyone else had issues with anything they might have experienced in the current government or did not feel that the government was living up to the high standards it set for itself, it was her responsibility to come forward and their responsibility to come forward, and no one did.

The Prime Minister left the impression that the former attorney general had just suddenly concocted a problem after she had moved out of the position of attorney general, that she woke up one day in February and decided she was upset with something that had happened months earlier, and nobody told the Prime Minister. He never heard anything about it. None of his team had heard a thing.

The Budget

Well, it turns out that the Prime Minister was uttering a straight-up falsehood. There are other words, unparliamentary words, that would describe that utterance, because the evidence is clear that the former attorney general did, time and time again, warn the Prime Minister and his team that their behaviour and their interference were inappropriate. In a September 18 meeting with the Prime Minister and the clerk, she reported that she looked him in the eye and asked if he was interfering with her work as attorney general, at which he backed off and said that of course he was not. She said to him that she strongly advised against it. She said that to his face, yet he would go in front of all Canadians, 37 million Canadians, and deny that she had ever raised any concern at all.

If members do not believe the former attorney general's story, which she documented and put on the public record in the justice committee—something the Prime Minister has not had the courage to do himself—then they only need to listen to the audio of the conversation between the former attorney general and the former clerk of the Privy Council, in which at least half a dozen times she uttered terms like, “I feel very uncomfortable”, “this is very inappropriate”, “I can't believe we're even having this conversation”. Over half a dozen times in that 17-minute conversation, she stated very clearly that what was happening was inappropriate, that the pressure campaign had to stop. She not only cited the conversation that she was engaged in at the moment with the clerk as an example; she also spoke to the clerk about Gerald Butts and Katie Telford's visit to her chief of staff and the pressure they applied.

If we count it conservatively, as I am fond of doing, this was over a half-dozen times in this conversation that the former attorney general raised the alarm to the Prime Minister's top public servant, and what did he say? He said that he had a conversation coming with the Prime Minister and that he was not going to be happy to hear this. Michael Wernick was very clear that he was going to get off the phone with her and get on the phone with the Prime Minister.

This weekend we heard from the Prime Minister that he did not know anything about that conversation, did not know that his top public servant had a conversation like that with his attorney general about an issue that everyone in the government says the Prime Minister was very focused on. In the terms given by the clerk himself, the Prime Minister was “firm” on the issue and was in a “mood” on the issue. This was an issue that was very important to him and he apparently knew that the clerk was calling the attorney general about it, but after the call happened, everyone just forgot to report to the Prime Minister or to his staff that it had occurred. What had been said in that conversation just evaporated into thin air.

• (1255)

A month would go by, two months would go by, and the Prime Minister would never learn of all the things we heard in that recording, not until she relayed them in a parliamentary committee months later. Give me a break.

Nobody believes the Prime Minister was blind to what went on in that conversation. His attempts to say he was will only be met with the derision of millions of Canadians who know better. It is utterly impossible to imagine he would not have known.

Even if people want to imagine it, even if they believe that somehow the clerk forgot to mention it to the Prime Minister, there is more evidence that the Prime Minister knew of her concerns.

Before I move on to that evidence, I just want to say that there is a new explanation out about why the clerk apparently did not tell the Prime Minister about the call, and that explanation is that everyone went on vacation. He did the phone call with the former attorney general in which he basically implored her to help the company get a deferred prosecution agreement so that it would not face trial for its \$100-plus million of fraud and bribery, and then she pushed back hard, saying it was inappropriate and that she felt very uncomfortable and it reminded her of the Saturday night massacre. This explosive conversation happened and what happened after a talk like that? They were so exhausted that they went on vacation. Everyone just up and left for Christmas.

The problem is that they did not. Now we have public records that the Prime Minister's vacation did not start for another 48 hours. The clerk and the Prime Minister speak daily, sometimes hourly. Of course, it would have been very easy for him to report the conversation. Furthermore, whatever vacation the Prime Minister had, it would not have lasted longer than a week or two, in which case he would have known about it in January, well before the cabinet shuffle.

Finally, we have the testimony from the clerk, before the justice committee, that this Prime Minister can be reached 24-7.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Through the switchboard.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Yes. Pick up the phone. For anybody who has ever called the Prime Minister's switchboard, it is an interesting experience. People can just call up and ask for anyone in the world they want, and they are on hold for about 30 seconds and then they have them. It is a pretty impressive system of communication.

Somehow it did not work in the Prime Minister's office for the month following this extraordinary interaction. The clerk just could not get hold of the Prime Minister. One day he was surfing in Tofino and the next day he was doing something else. It was just absolutely impossible for the clerk to relay this extraordinary conversation about an issue that was extremely pressing. That is what we are expected to believe.

That is an example of a contradiction on which we need clarity. I am standing and speaking at great length, much to the dismay and torment of my Liberal colleagues across the way. I am here to say that I will put an end to this merciless address, as long as they agree that all the witnesses, all of the players who interfered with the former attorney general, will come before a parliamentary committee and answer for their actions so that we can get to the bottom of this scandal.

At any moment, I would welcome the government House leader or the deputy House leader rising to announce that the cover-up is over, that the Prime Minister has agreed that all the witnesses in his office and other ministerial offices, and the Prime Minister himself, will all come before a parliamentary committee to testify under oath about what happened in this scandal.

The Budget

If they do that, then I will grant the mercy of ending this speech and allowing them to go back to bragging about their deficit spending and their tax increases. They could do it all day long, every day, until October when voters will render a swift verdict against those policies as well.

● (1300)

However, the fact remains that there are enormous and glaring contradictions between the Prime Minister's personal utterances and the now publicly available evidence to the contrary, evidence that the Prime Minister would like us to ignore and sweep under the table, that he would like to bury under tens of billions of dollars of borrowed money that he has piled into this pre-election budget.

Our answer to him is no. We are not going to allow him to bury the truth. We are going to stand here and we are going to speak up, and we are going to use every tool in the parliamentary tool kit to end the Prime Minister's cover-up and get to the truth.

For a moment I would like to comment on the methodology of the cover-up itself. We have talked about the apparent crime and now let us talk about the cover-up. The government came forward with a massive new deficit spending budget. It is a promise-breaking deficit. During the last election, the Prime Minister promised that he would have three tiny deficits never to exceed \$10 billion, followed by a balanced budget in the year 2019. In fact, as he put it, "the budget will balance itself". That was supposed to happen in the here and now. Instead, we have had deficits that have already totalled \$60 billion, which is three times the total he promised. As well, the budget deficit this year is \$20 billion more. Again, this is in a year in which there was supposed to be no deficit.

Now in this pre-election budget, in order to distract from the Prime Minister's SNC-Lavalin scandal, he added \$41 billion in new cash spending. He is basically taking a fire hose and spraying cash in all directions in the hopes that grateful Canadian voters will be distracted from his personal conduct and vote for him in spite of all that he has done. However, Canadians know that spending to distract from a scandal before an election is always followed by higher taxes after the election. That is exactly what is happening in this case.

As I said earlier, this is a Kathleen Wynne three-step: massive scandal, massive spending to distract from that scandal and massive tax increases to pay for it all after the election is over.

What evidence do we have of the Liberals' intention to raise taxes after the election? Let us start with the first and most obvious piece, which is that they have already done it once. The best indicator of future behaviour is past behaviour. The government came into office promising it would never raise taxes on the middle class and then it went ahead and did exactly that. It took away the children's fitness tax credit, the public transit tax credit and income splitting, which made life a little fairer for families with a single income or where one spouse earned more than another. The government raised the CPP premiums and even targeted small businesses, with specific tax increases going to small family-owned operations. Those tax increases penalized companies that shared the earnings and work among family members or that saved within the company itself. All of those tax increases have happened already.

According to a non-partisan and impartial study by the Fraser Institute, the average middle-class family is paying \$800 more in income taxes than when the government first took office. That does not even include increases to payroll taxes or the carbon tax, which just took effect in Ontario, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan today.

These tax increases already exist. Canadians know that if a government is going to raise their taxes once, it will raise their taxes again, and it has tried. It has tried to implement other tax increases that we stopped through massive political pressure and public backlash.

Let us go through the list of taxes the government tried and failed to raise. It tried to take away the disability tax credit from diabetics and families with autistic children, which would have raised the taxes on those families by about \$1,000. It backed off after we exposed its doing it. The government then tried to put in a new tax on health and dental benefits. This tax increase was exposed through a series of media leaks, showing that the finance department, under the leadership of the minister, was quietly doing the research and laying the groundwork to raise taxes on anyone who dared have a dental or supplementary health plan. Again through relentless pressure from Her Majesty's loyal opposition and an uprising by Canadian workers who cherish their health benefits, the government had to back down from that tax increase as well.

● (1305)

The government tried to impose a tax on the passive income of small businesses of as high as 73%. It had to put that tax change on ice after a group of farmers, shopkeepers and pizza-shop owners rose up and fought back. It tried to double the tax on small business owners who transfer their businesses from father to son, or mother to daughter. This tax increase would have made the tax twice as high for a farmer to transfer his farm to his son, as it would if that farmer was to transfer the farm to a foreign multinational corporation. That would have ensured that, within one generation, our farmers would be tenants on their ancestral farmlands, rather than owners of the land passed down from generation to generation. Thank goodness the Liberal government, under relentless pressure from the opposition side of the House of Commons, put those tax increases on hold until after the election, when it no longer needs the voters but still needs their money.

That brings us to the reason the Liberals need people's money. The finance minister has been growing spending at a rate of about 7% a year, two and a half times the combined rate of inflation and population growth. When spending grows faster than revenue, over the long run, taxes end up being raised to pay for it. Sure, it can borrow in the short run to pay for it but that makes the problem worse, because not only does the government have to pay for the spending into the future but it has to pay for the interest on all of the growing debt. That interest is growing.

The Budget

Two years ago, we paid \$23 billion in annual federal debt interest. According to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, interest payments will rise to almost \$40 billion over the next five years. In other words, we will spend as much on debt interest as we now spend on health care transfers, money for bankers and bondholders instead of doctors and nurses. Who will pay for all of that interest? It will be taxpayers. There is no free money out there and those bondholders on Bay Street and Wall Street do not lend us money out of charity. They expect to get back in return more than they lent us in the first place. That is the way it works. It is government-run capitalism where people get rich by feeding off the state, feeding off big government, at the expense of working-class taxpayers.

That is an example of a wealth transfer, one that people too often forget about. Those who claim they believe so fervently in social justice have no problem whatsoever taking money from the lady who bags groceries at the corner store to pay interest on the national debt to wealthy multi-millionaire bondholders who own the government's debt. It is a direct transfer from the have-nots to the have-yachts, and it is a transfer of wealth with which the Liberal government seems to have no problem as it carries out an unprecedented engorgement of spending that will cost working-class families, present and yet unborn. That is the reality of the debt and we know that debt will metastasize into tax increases if not brought under control in the near future.

We have seen the consequences of rising debt right here in the province of Ontario, where Kathleen Wynne and Dalton McGuinty, the Prime Minister's two mentors, whose policy agendas were crafted by Gerald Butts, made Ontario the most indebted jurisdiction in all of North America, more debt as a share of GDP than any of the 50 states or 10 provinces. Now the province is faced with a \$14-billion deficit and nothing but ugly decisions ahead of it.

One would think that the Prime Minister would learn from the mistakes of his mentors, that they would sit him down and say, knowing he is trying to follow in their footsteps, please learn from the errors of our ways, but apparently they have not. He will make the same mistakes over and over again, as is customary when people do not learn from history. Today's debt will mean tomorrow's taxes if the Prime Minister is re-elected.

● (1310)

I do not need to talk just about tomorrow. I can talk about today. Today is April Fool's Day, and the joke is on taxpayers. They have shown up at gas stations across Ontario and Saskatchewan, and they have seen gas prices rise. They are up four cents in just one day. However, do not be fooled because it is April 1. It is only the beginning.

The Prime Minister admits, and this is in the government's published documents, that the tax will more than double from \$20 today to \$50-per-tonne of carbon in three years. He will not tell us how much that tax will actually cost people. Sure, the government puts out public relations documents claiming that the full implementation of the carbon tax will cost a family of two in Ontario only about \$600. That assumes that the government is telling the truth.

Carbon taxes are notoriously insidious, because all the costs are embedded in literally millions of products. Anything made with or

transported by energy becomes more expensive. Sometimes that expense compounds. A single product, such as a plastic pipe, has petroleum products in it. The carbon tax makes the raw material more expensive. Heating the factory then becomes more expensive, and operating the machinery to run the systems becomes more expensive. In most provinces where we use gas or coal to electrify our economy, electricity becomes more expensive. When the product is finally manufactured, it has to be transported to a store, and that transportation is more expensive.

We can see that for one product, the tax is compounded over and over again until it finally reaches the storefront, where the consumer buys it and pays HST not just on the product but on all the carbon tax pricing embedded in the product. That is a tax on a tax.

The Prime Minister admits, in the government's own documents, which claim that an Ontario family will pay just \$600 in carbon taxes, that the \$600 does not include the HST on the tax, the tax on the tax. Right there we have an admission that this is a lot more expensive as a scheme than he has thus far admitted. Furthermore, even if the government takes out the HST, can we really believe that it will cost just \$600 in Ontario or \$1,000 in Saskatchewan? The answer is no.

I filed something called an access to information request to get all the documents that point to the cost of the carbon tax so that I could publish them for the Canadian people. There is good news and bad news. The good news is that I got the documents. The bad news is that all the numbers are blacked out. In other words, one can find out that it costs money, just not how much.

Canadians are expected to just take the Prime Minister at his word when he says that the carbon tax will cost just \$600 in Ontario. If he is right, why would he not release all the source documents and put them out there and let the chips fall where they may? If I am wrong and, in fact, the carbon tax does not cost a penny more than \$600 bucks in Ontario and \$1,000 in Saskatchewan, he could put the unredacted documents out and let everyone analyze them for accuracy.

The excuse the government is giving is that the numbers represent advice by public servants to ministers, which is always confidential. However, I am not looking for advice. I am looking for the numbers. There is a difference between dollar value and advice. The public servants may have recommended one particular model of carbon tax, which would be advice. I would be fine with that being blacked out, because that's what the act says. However, that is not what is blacked out. What is blacked out is the cost to Canadian families of the carbon tax.

The Budget

•(1315)

If members want to know the difference between dollar value and advice, take a trip to a restaurant and ask the waiter what he recommends. His recommendation would be advice. However, the price on the menu would not be advice. The price might lead to a recommendation, but it is not itself a recommendation. Therefore, the government's legal justification for blacking out these numbers is false, which is why the Information Commissioner is investigating Finance Canada and Environment Canada.

The preliminary finding of the commissioner is that, in fact, no, the information is not to be redacted. It is to be made public. However, we continue to wait and wait, presumably until after the election, to find out the true cost of the carbon tax, because the government is confusing two different concepts: advice versus price. Canadians want to know the price of the carbon tax. How can we do a cost-benefit analysis if we do not know the cost? It is half the equation. It is the difference between these two different things that is profoundly at the heart of my complaint to the Information Commissioner.

I believe that, ultimately, if the government does not relent, eventually the Information Commissioner might have to take the government to court and demand the full and final disclosure of this material. They do not have to take it that far. Let us not spend money on lawyers. Let us not go before a court. Let us not have the government found to be covering up something else. Remember, the reason is it in so much trouble right now is because of a cover-up. It does not need to extend scandal cover-up to a carbon tax cover-up. Just give us the numbers and then let Canadians decide if this tax and this government are worth the price.

I hear a member across the way asking if that is it. Just end the cover-ups, and that will be it. The member for Kingston across the way can have relief—

•(1320)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: It is Kingston and the Islands. The islanders get upset if you do not mention them.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: The member for Kingston and the Islands, the beautiful islands—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I would remind the member for Kingston and the Islands that he will have lots of time for questions and comments when we get to that point. In the meantime, I would ask that he listen to the conversation in order that he may have a better opportunity to really ask those questions and comments.

The hon. member for Carleton.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, the member across the way mentioned that the islanders, the people who live close to Kingston who live on the islands, are angry when they are not mentioned. For that I apologize. I will herein ever after refer to his riding as Kingston and the Islands, if only he will do one thing, which is promise to end the carbon tax on those islanders who have to fill up their boats with gasoline to transit themselves where they are going. If I would say the full riding name and he would put an end to the carbon tax, the people right across his riding would be

happy as clams. I invite him to do that in the spirit of compromise. We reach across the aisle.

In all seriousness, if the member wants to bring an end to my speech, he can do so. There is one thing I am asking to stop this speech: that the Liberal government agree to bring all the participants in the SNC-Lavalin cover-up scandal before a parliamentary inquiry. We can do it at the justice committee or at the ethics committee. We have to do it, because Canadians are demanding that we get to the bottom of this scandal.

I have digressed from the previous argument I was making that if the current Liberal government is re-elected, Canadians will pay massive tax increases. I was finishing up talking about how the government refuses to reveal the true cost of a \$50-a-tonne carbon tax. What I was about to progress to from there is that \$50 is just the beginning. The government has admitted that in the year 2023, which will happen after the next election, it plans to increase the severity of the carbon tax, which will kick in during the mandate of the next government. However, the current Prime Minister expects Canadians to vote for him in October without knowing how high he will raise the tax. Even if people believe that a \$50-a-tonne carbon tax will only translate into a \$600 bill for the average Ontario family, and I do not believe that, they have to be suspicious about how much he will increase the tax rate after the next election.

Documents produced for the finance minister suggest that the tax will have to increase in severity at that time. Other documents produced by officials for the environment minister suggest that the tax will rise to as much as \$100 a tonne in the short run and \$300 a tonne in the long run. That latter price would be 15 times higher than the tax is today. According to the government's own numbers, a \$300-a-tonne carbon tax would translate to a cost of \$5,000 for a family of two people in Saskatchewan or \$3,000 for a family of two people in Ontario.

If people inherit a big family fortune like the Prime Minister has, a trust fund, and have been able to shelter their money from taxes, as he did for so many years while his trust fund was able to grow and multiply without counting against his own income, they might not worry about a \$5,000 carbon tax in Saskatchewan or a \$3,000 carbon tax in Ontario. However, for everyday Canadians who struggle just to get by, for single mothers, for seniors on fixed incomes, for the small business owner of a pizza shop in Findlay Creek, in my riding, I can say that \$3,000 is one heck of a lot of money. The people I am speaking to, as I knock on thousands of doors in my riding of Carleton, tell me that they are just getting by. They are not getting ahead. Yes, they are getting by. They are barely paying their mortgages. They are barely paying their property taxes. They are filing their income tax, regrettably. They are just getting by. They cannot afford a \$3,000-a-year carbon tax.

•(1325)

I have to give the Prime Minister some kudos for his Machiavellian scheme, because he, under the guidance of Gerald Butts, came up with a scheme to get the Liberals through the election. It is quite audacious to go into an election right after bringing in a massive new tax on people's energy use.

The Budget

How are the Liberals going to do it? They are going to give people a few bucks in rebate cheques before the election and then hit them with thousands of dollars in higher taxes after the election. It is very clever. People will think that even though gas and home heating costs are going up by 10% and groceries are getting more expensive, the little cheque they will get for \$100, which will arrive just a few months before the election, will get them through until October.

Then, after the election is over, there will be a surprise: The carbon tax will be a lot more expensive than they thought it was. However, it will be too late to do anything about it. It is like buying a product in a store and only finding out the price charged to the credit card after the purchase has been made, and then finding out that there is no return policy and that the purchaser is stuck paying for it for four years.

That is the Prime Minister's scam. It is the carbon tax cover-up. The government gives people some assurance before the election and then raises their taxes after the election, when the Prime Minister no longer needs voters but still needs their money.

This tax increase will cost people a fortune, and the Prime Minister knows something about fortunes, as he inherited one. He inherited a multi-million-dollar fortune from his grandfather, who ironically made his money with an empire of gas stations, the same gas stations where the Prime Minister's tax is taking effect today.

The Prime Minister's grandfather was an example of a great Canadian. He was an entrepreneur. He started, as I understand, from reasonably modest means, but built something great. He passed that fortune down to Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who, as a result of his father's effort, did not have to work a day in his life, and it has passed on to this Prime Minister, who has enjoyed a similar privilege.

The Prime Minister kept that fortune in a trust fund, called a testamentary trust fund, which had a special tax treatment that allowed him to avoid paying the same tax rates on his income that other Canadians would have to pay. He kept it in that trust fund until 2014, when he rose in the House of Commons and voted against a bill by the former Harper government that got rid of the trust fund loophole. Ironically, the Harper government was getting rid of this trust fund loophole, and the Prime Minister, then an opposition MP, stood up and voted based on his personal interest to keep that loophole in place. Why should we be surprised, as he had benefited from it for so long?

I say this because I think it gives us a window into his state of mind. He believes that there is no such thing as scarcity, that we can just get money from someone else and make others pay for our mistakes. People who come from a working-class background grow up with parents who tell them that they can either ski or skate, but they cannot do both, or the family can either go to a cottage or to Disneyland, but definitely cannot do both. That is the basic scarcity that most middle-class kids grow up with.

As a result, when they get a job and have to pay off their student debt, they know there is scarcity. They therefore make responsible decisions in their early 20s to pay down debt so that they can get a mortgage and buy a house. People who have grown up with those kinds of preoccupations have a different outlook from the Prime Minister's, since he has never had to worry about money. He has

never had to worry about his own money, so he does not worry about anyone else's either, and that has informed the fiscal policy that he brings to the floor of the House of Commons.

• (1330)

However, in the real world where people have to work for a living and have to live within their means, they understand some basic things. They know they cannot borrow their way out of debt, they cannot tax their way to prosperity and they cannot just make others pay for their mistakes. They understand those basic rules of life that have allowed them and all of us to build an unprecedented level of prosperity in this country and countries like ours. It is the free market system. It is the basic idea that through the voluntary exchange of work for wages, product for payment and interest for investment, people trade what they have for what they want, and because there is a willing and voluntary partner on the other end of the transaction, everyone is always better off when they do. If I have an apple and want an orange and another person has an orange and wants an apple and we trade, we each have something more valuable to us than we had before, even though between us, we still just have an apple and an orange. That is the genius of the voluntary system of free exchange and free enterprise.

The Prime Minister does not believe in free enterprise. He believes in crony corporatism. He believes economic resources should be moved around by government, that economic decisions should be political rather than voluntary, that we should move money by mandatory taxation rather than by voluntary exchange.

We see that in the crony corporatism that he has played out as Prime Minister. He gave a \$400-million interest-free loan to his friends at Bombardier. What effect did that have? The company, since getting that money from Canadian taxpayers, has moved the jobs to South Carolina and the intellectual property to Europe. In other words, South Carolina got the jobs, Europe got the intellectual property and Canadian taxpayers got the bill.

What would have motivated the Prime Minister to do something like that? It turns out that the billionaire Bombardier-Beaudoin family owns 53% of the company's shares. Normally when a company like that is short of cash, it sells more shares, but that would dilute the interest of the billionaire family and cause it to become a minority shareholder. In that case, this billionaire family would lose control of the company, so instead of issuing more shares, it asked the government for a handout and had a willing partner in the Prime Minister, who was happy as a clam to provide it. Instead of using the free market system, in which resources are allocated based on the voluntary decisions of investors, consumers and workers, he used the government system, coercing \$400 million out of the pockets of taxpayers and giving it to a favoured few.

The difference between these two approaches to economics is this: In the free market, one gets ahead by having the best product; in crony corporatism, one gets ahead by having the best lobbyist. In the free market, business has to obsess about pleasing customers; in the government-run economic system, business gets ahead by pleasing politicians.

The Budget

I do not know about anyone else, but I think we would all be better off if businesses saw their interests as being intrinsically linked to pleasing customers rather than appeasing politicians.

We hear a lot of talk about inequality from our friends across the way. It is one of their favourite excuses for growing the size and cost of government. Of course, they claim government is this wonderful Robin Hood. It is just so strange, though, that their Robin Hood always steals from the poor and gives to the rich.

They have created something called the Infrastructure Bank. The Infrastructure Bank is designed to give low-interest loan guarantees and investments directly to companies like SNC-Lavalin to protect them against their own bad investments, and here is how it works.

Right now, if a large construction company builds a bridge and that bridge goes way over budget, the company has to pay for the loss. It is called a fixed-price contract. Thank God for that, because when these incompetent CEOs mess up a big construction project, I believe they are the ones who should pay for it, not taxpayers.

However, the Infrastructure Bank would give that company a loan guarantee, so that if it messes it up, the taxpayer will come to the rescue and pay for all of its mistakes. In other words, we have another example of these large construction companies and the private equity and investment bankers that back them up being protected against their own incompetence by the taxpayer.

● (1335)

Here again it is the same working-class person who is already paying taxes to pay the interest on our national debt—money that will go to wealthy bondholders—who will now have to pay for the incompetence of executives and shareholders in construction companies that mess up, go over budget, or fail to deliver their projects on time and on budget. That is yet another example of big government coming to the rescue of the rich at the expense of everyone else.

By the way, did I mention that the Infrastructure Bank has only one project so far, and can we guess what company is involved in that project? We have a winner over there. Yes, SNC-Lavalin was one of the companies involved in the only project that the Infrastructure Bank has now approved. I guess we can call it the SNC-Lavalin bank, a big multi-billion-dollar pile of cash to protect wealthy corporate interests that have access to government levers.

Again in this example, the free market has a solution. The free market is absolutely ruthless with incompetent CEOs. It punishes them brutally, because if they do not deliver a product or service on time and on budget to the satisfaction of the customer, they get fired. Then the shareholders vote out that executive and put in someone who can do the job properly.

However, in a system in which governments are always coming to the rescue, incompetent CEOs and executives get to stay around and suck off the system and bleed everyone else dry. That is exactly the system of crony capitalism that the Prime Minister is creating, and it is playing itself out in the corporate corruption charges against SNC-Lavalin that we are discussing today. The Liberals never learn.

It is ironic how they were caught. It points to the circular nature of history. I will tell the story.

It is the story of the sponsorship scandal. The Liberal Party was engaged in what a judge called an “elaborate kickback scheme” to flow millions of dollars through a program that was supposedly designed to help fight separatism. Money went to Liberal-linked ad agencies, which then flowed the money back to the Liberal Party.

It was funny, because a lot of the ad agencies were charged by the RCMP for fraud, but who was never charged? It was the Liberal Party itself, even though the party came forward and admitted that it had stolen at least \$1 million.

I guess one could say it was to their credit that they agreed to pay that money back after they were caught, but strangely, even after that admission, no one charged them. We began wondering back in 2005 why they were not charged, since stealing \$1 million is a crime, and we came to a conclusion: It was because the Attorney General, a Liberal politician, was in charge of prosecutions and in charge of laying formal allegations under breaches of federal law. Naturally, when a Liberal politician is deciding if the Liberal Party is going to be charged, we run the risk that even when those charges are merited, they will not even happen.

Along came Stephen Harper with the Federal Accountability Act. He took the position of prosecutor out of the office of the Attorney General and made it a stand-alone entity. Madame Roussel is our top prosecutor, and she has the ability to prosecute any federal crime. She does not have to ask a politician for permission when she does so. Here is where the problem started for the Prime Minister.

He was expecting to use his massive powers to reach into the bureaucracy and order that SNC-Lavalin get a special deal for its \$130 million of fraud and bribery charges. All of a sudden, he realized he could not do that, that we do not live in a banana republic, that the Prime Minister cannot simply order a prosecutor to call off a trial, so he called his attorney general and told her to do it. He told her to tell the prosecutor to lay off SNC-Lavalin. She said that under the accountability act of Stephen Harper, if she were to do such an outrageous thing, it would have to be put in writing.

● (1340)

That written document would then be published. Any political direction that goes to the top prosecutor in the land must be written down and put before the eyes of every single Canadian, so people can judge for themselves. Because of that change, which I helped pass through the House of Commons in 2006 as the parliamentary secretary to the then Treasury Board minister, this former attorney general was able to prevent this hideous interference in our criminal justice system.

The Budget

Is it not funny that what tripped up this Liberal scandal was actually the last Liberal scandal? However, the Liberal Party never learns. The Liberals always go back to their own ways. “And the burnt Fool’s bandaged finger goes wabbling back to the Fire”, as the old poem says. Of course, here we are again: Liberals burned by scandal and expecting everyone to cry crocodile tears for them. The reality is, for those people who have been caught up in all of the melodrama of this Liberal soap opera, that it is tempting to think it is all triviality, that it is an interpersonal spat between a bunch of Liberal politicians; they are catching lots of media headlines, but really it is not all that important, so let us just ignore it and get back to the \$20 billion deficit or the carbon tax or something like that.

As tempting as it is to dismiss it all as a bunch of interpersonal wheeling and dealing and a soap opera, let us remember this. There is nothing unique about the water in this country, other than that we have a lot of it. There is nothing intrinsic about us as a Canadian people that distinguishes us from the other peoples of the world. I love Canadians more than any other people, but we are all one species; we are all the same. However, what makes Canada enjoy a superior standard of living is not that we have something special or magical in our water or in our people; it is that we have freedom under the law. This is a law that has applied to every single human being with a beating heart and breathing lungs ever since the Magna Carta in 1215, when King John was forced to submit himself to his subjects and sign into existence the great charter, Magna Carta. He subjected himself, as a king, to following the law.

In that 800 years that has followed, in which the commoners met first in grain fields, hence the green carpet, we here have passed the law, and an independent and separate judiciary has administered that law. It has been a tradition that the Crown and all of the people of the court are subject to the law just like everyone else. That is why, it might be the greatest and most powerful corporation that ever existed, or one might be the wealthiest man on earth, but in the court of law the mighty are made low and everybody is equal. Whether one is a homeless person charged with stealing a loaf of bread, or a wealthy CEO charged with over \$100 million of fraud and bribery, as is the case with SNC-Lavalin, everyone must face the law. As soon as we accept that it is normal for a prime minister to pick people who are not subjected to the rules, as soon as we say that there are two laws, one for the people and one for the powerful, then we will be in a new and ugly era where we will replace the rule of law with the law of rulers.

● (1345)

That is not the foundation of our country, and that is not the way we should ever exist in this country. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister has taken us on a very slippery slope with this unprecedented degree of personal and political interference in a criminal probe of SNC-Lavalin.

I have already gone through a very extensive list of offences that members of this company have already plead guilty to and that the company itself now faces in court. That brings us to the present, where the government is trying to distract from the scandal before it by spraying \$41 billion of new spending all across the land in the hopes that Canadians will ignore or miss the scandal that is before them today.

A member across the way screamed out, “What about the budget?”, wanting to know why we cannot move on to talking about all of the deficits and the tax increases instead of about the scandal. The answer is that if he wants to talk about something else, there is a very easy way that we can do that: Tell the truth; just let all of the facts come out.

If the Prime Minister had done that at the outset instead of trying to cover it up, instead of stating repeated falsehoods about the affair, if he had stepped up to the plate and revealed everything he had done to interfere with the former attorney general’s role and to block the criminal trial for this Liberal-linked corporation, it would have been politically damaging, but at least we would have been able to move forward.

However, as is so often the case, the cover-up is just as bad as or perhaps worse than the crime itself. Hence, here we are today, having to pull facts out of the Prime Minister, one by one, like a rotten tooth. I have a solution, and that is to bring all of the players who are alleged to have interfered with the former attorney general before the justice committee or the ethics committee and have each and every one of them testify under oath about what they did and what they know.

When that happens, we as Canadians will be able to judge what happened and whether the Prime Minister is culpable for making it happen. If he has absolutely nothing to hide, surely he would say yes to this request. At the very least, if he cares at all about the well-being of members on the other side, he would succeed in making me stop this speech, which I know members on the other side are not enjoying at all.

I am told that on this side there is a different opinion. It would probably give the Prime Minister great pleasure to disappoint this group over here by bringing an end to my speech and agreeing to end the cover-up. If he were to simply allow all of the witnesses to come forward, then that would put an end to all of this right now. I await a member of the government rising to his or her feet on a point of order to interrupt my speech and say that they will relent, that they will end the cover-up, that they will open the committees for a full-scale investigation. In that spirit, we could go forward and find out what really occurred.

If I could reiterate, here are some of the things we would like to know. First, the Prime Minister claimed that the former attorney general never warned him that his interference in the SNC-Lavalin scandal was inappropriate. He claimed that he did not know she was so upset; he did not find out about it until after the story broke in *The Globe and Mail*.

● (1350)

However, we have documented evidence going back to September showing that the former attorney general told the Prime Minister personally, as well as his senior staff, again and again, from September to December, that she was uncomfortable with their inappropriate interference in her role as Attorney General with respect to the SNC-Lavalin criminal trial.

The Budget

We want to know why the Prime Minister looked 37 million Canadians in the eyes and told them that he knew nothing about the former attorney general's complaints and that it was all news to him. He said that if anyone, including the former attorney general, had issues with anything they might have experienced in this government or did not feel that the government was living up to the high standards it had set for itself, it was their responsibility to come forward, and no one did.

We now know that statement, which was delivered at a press conference on February 15, was patently false. Why will the Prime Minister not come before a parliamentary committee, put his hand on the good book and testify to explain why he would have made a comment like that to 37 million Canadians when he knew it was not true?

Next, we want to know about the inconsistencies in this scandal. The Prime Minister has offered varying and confusing explanations about why the former attorney general was moved out of her position to Veterans Affairs. First of all, it was Scott Brison's fault. Does everyone remember that old line? Scott Brison left as Treasury Board president and so the government had to get rid of its Attorney General. It is a whole intricate story of musical chairs that resulted from this one man leaving, even though she was not the one who replaced him in his job.

Then, last week, we heard a funny new story that the reason the Prime Minister moved the former attorney general was because she wanted to appoint a respected judge to the head of the Supreme Court who was just not Liberal enough. If he had been more Liberal, then the Prime Minister would have been more happy with his Attorney General and would have kept her in that position. That is the latest explanation on why she was moved out as Attorney General.

On and on this story goes. We all know what happened was that after a period of relentless lobbying, the former attorney general refused to grant a special deal to SNC-Lavalin. On December 19, she told the top public servant in the Prime Minister's government that she was waiting for "the other shoe to drop." She compared it to the Saturday night massacre when Richard Nixon fired his whole staff to try to cover up Watergate.

The former attorney general said that she was waiting for the other shoe to drop. Of course, a month later it did drop. She was moved out as Attorney General after this collision she had with the Prime Minister over his intention to give a special deal to SNC-Lavalin with respect to the criminal charges it faced for fraud and bribery. We want to know the real reason that the Prime Minister moved his Attorney General. Is the Scott Brison story still the current one, or are we now moving on to the story about her picking judges who are not Liberal enough?

The former attorney general has a very simple story, and she has stuck to her story. That story is that she was moved out because she refused to grant a special deal to this company. We want to know the truth in that matter. We want to know about why it was that the chief of staff to the finance minister repeatedly hounded and used threatening language in writing, through text messages we have now seen, to senior staff in the former attorney general's office.

We also want to know about this story regarding jobs. The government initially claimed that the reason the Prime Minister was so eager to prevent criminal charges was that SNC-Lavalin would leave Canada if the charges went ahead.

● (1355)

We now know that is not true. The company has a \$1.5-billion loan agreement with the Quebec pension plan requiring that it keep its headquarters in Montreal where, incidentally, it just signed a 20-year lease on its building and is making major renovations to accommodate its roughly 2,000 Montreal employees. We also know that the company has 52 billion dollars' worth of contracts, the five biggest construction projects in the country. Construction projects cannot leave the country because the construction has to be done at the construction site. In other words, it is not possible for SNC-Lavalin to get up and ship out tomorrow if it faces charges, and the CEO of the company has confirmed that he made no such threat.

Finally, the government kept claiming that if the charges went ahead the company would lose access to federal contracts, costing the company billions of dollars and many jobs. We also know that is not true because the government, in December 2015, gave an exemption to SNC-Lavalin, allowing it to continue to bid on federal work even though it had previously been banned because of charges of corruption and bribery. In other words, the government has the ability to extend an exemption to SNC-Lavalin again if the company is convicted of corporate corruption.

Therefore, if it is not about protecting jobs or federal contracts, who exactly is the government protecting with its relentless and endless attempts to get this company out of a trial? It is extraordinary. There are thousands of trials and thousands of charges laid in this country every year, and politicians never get involved in them. It is just not done. If someone comes into one of our offices and says that they have been charged with bank robbery or some other offence and asks for our help, we politely show them the door.

However, this company, accused of stealing \$130 million from the world's poorest people, knocks on the door of the Prime Minister's Office and asks if the government can help it get off of these charges and the Prime Minister agrees, not once, not twice but 20 times, to badger and hound his Attorney General to get the company off of the charges.

Now that we know that this was not about protecting jobs, we need to know who the powerful players are who are being protected by the Prime Minister's attempt to block this trial—

● (1400)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Unfortunately, I have to interrupt the hon. member for Carleton, but he will have the opportunity to continue his speech after question period.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS***[Translation]***QUEBEC'S RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION**

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, it was insulting enough when the Conservatives took Quebec to court over its right to self-determination, but now the Liberals are adding insult to injury. They are now claiming, in English only, that Quebec's independence is illegal without permission from the rest of Canada.

I stand with the Quebec National Assembly, which unanimously recognized that Quebec's right to self-determination is non-negotiable.

On behalf of the Quebec nation, I want to reiterate that, whether one is a separatist or not, our future is ours alone to decide.

I want to reiterate that no matter what anyone says or does, Quebec is a distinct society, free and capable of assuming its destiny.

The only permission Quebec needs to form its own country is the permission of the Quebec nation. Let me be clear: Quebec will not allow anyone to control its democracy.

* * *

*[English]***AEROSPACE INDUSTRY**

Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Canadian aerospace industry is an important economic driver in every region of the country.

British Columbia, for example, has the third-largest aerospace footprint, with over 200 companies directly or indirectly employing nearly 30,000 workers. In my riding of Kelowna—Lake Country, both KF Aerospace and Carson Air continue to have a growing need for experienced aircraft maintenance engineers and technicians.

In fact, Canada-wide, nearly 5,300 new aircraft technicians will be needed by 2025. As with the current pilot shortage, it is important that public and private sectors work together to engage the next generation of aircraft maintainers.

Aviation connects Canada. The health and well-being of this sector is of critical importance to our economy and deserves our utmost attention.

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BEER, WINE AND SPIRITS INDUSTRIES

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Madam Speaker, today I invite everyone in the House to raise a glass for some hard-working Canadians: our brewers, winemakers, distillers and farmers. They deserve it because, after today, their lives will be much more difficult, as Canadians will have to pay more to enjoy their world-class local products.

Today, the Liberals are increasing the price of everything but not just through the carbon tax. The Liberals' never-ending escalator tax increases the cost of beer, wine and spirits for the third time in two years. It is Liberal tax grab after Liberal tax grab. The rest of us will

have to pay over and over as the escalator tax increases each and every year.

I know this is April Fool's Day and I wish this were a joke, but it is not. This industry supports more than 150,000 middle-class jobs. We are in the middle of a canola crisis. Now our barley, wheat, rye and grape growers are also going to have to pay the price for Liberal failures.

It is time for sober second thought. The Liberals need to repeal this pocket-picking tax on Canadians and stop taxing the fun out of April Fool's Day.

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*[Translation]***DAUGHTERS OF THE VOTE**

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this week, 338 dynamic and passionate young women are on Parliament Hill to share their vision for Canada as part of the Daughters of the Vote program.

I am proud to announce that, this year, one of the members of my youth council, Chloé Chaudron, was selected to represent the riding of Hull—Aylmer.

[English]

Chloé is a psychology graduate from the Université du Québec en Outaouais and now works in the riding for the Association québécoise de défense des droits des personnes retraitées et préretraitées.

[Translation]

I recently rose in the House to talk about my two youth councils, and it is once again an honour to acknowledge the efforts of a young woman from my region.

As I mentioned last week, young people are not the future leaders of our country; they are today's leaders.

Chloé, know that we all support you and we wish you good luck this year.

* * *

● (1405)

*[English]***AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY**

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there has been steel dumping, steel tariffs, government loans with no Canadian content obligations, no basic manufacturing strategy and massive auto layoffs.

We heard devastating news last week. This time it is our Chrysler Windsor assembly plant and feeder plants like Integram that are hit, yet nowhere else but in Windsor—Tecumseh, and the rest of Essex County, will one find our concentration of vast talent and innovation and the premiere workforce to support it.

Statements by Members

Our Chrysler Unifor Local 444 workers are proud of their work and we are proud of the products they make and the reputation they give Canada on the world stage. That is what all workers want from their livelihoods, to work for a reputable company, putting out reputable work and good jobs.

The current Liberal government is just—

The Speaker: The hon. member for London North Centre.

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PETER HARDING

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to highlight the legacy of a remarkable Londoner, Mr. Peter Harding.

During his stellar career with the London Fire Department, Peter rose through the ranks to become deputy chief, prior to retiring in 1998. He also volunteered for 37 years with the St. John Ambulance Brigade, obtaining the rank of provincial superintendent. He was a chartered member of the London and Area Food Bank and served on the Irish Benevolent Society's board of directors. In 2003, Peter was given the honour of being knighted as a Knight of Justice. Devoted to his church and a member of the Knights of Columbus, Peter worked tirelessly to build London.

On December 4, sadly, Peter passed away due to ingesting carcinogens during his career as a firefighter. Last week, the City of London voted to rename Fire Station No. 4 in his honour, a fitting tribute for all Peter has contributed to our city.

To Peter's wife, Janet, to their children, to his grandchildren, indeed to his entire family, please know that Peter was a hero and Londoners, for generations, will continue to learn of his legacy.

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CARBON PRICING

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, starting today, the Prime Minister is sticking Canadians with his punitive carbon tax, but Canadians are no fools and they know they will pay more at the pump, more to heat their homes and more for food to feed their families. It is no laughing matter to punish people with a useless tax just to get from point A to point B when they live in rural communities or on farms.

The Liberal carbon tax starts at \$20 per tonne, goes up to \$50 in three years and the Liberals are planning to increase it to \$300 per tonne. For many Canadians who are barely making ends meet, this crippling carbon tax is more than a bad joke. Shame on the government for forcing Canadians to pick between being warm in the winter or feeding their families.

The Prime Minister is wildly out of touch with reality and his vindictive carbon tax is a form of extortion on rural Canadians. As Conservatives, we understand that fuel, food and heat are not luxuries. They are the necessities of life. A Conservative government in October 2019 will eliminate all tax on home heating and axe the carbon tax.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS MEDAL WINNER

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a proud Islander to recognize Roy Paynter of Kensington, P.E.I., for his incredible accomplishments at the Special Olympics World Summer Games last month in Abu Dhabi. Roy brought home four medals in swimming: gold in the 200-metre freestyle, gold in the 100-metre breaststroke, silver in the four by 50-metre relay and bronze in the 100-metre backstroke.

Roy earned his place on Team Canada through his strong showing at the Special Olympics Canada Summer Games in 2018 when he took home five medals, including two gold. For Roy, the competition is not just about medals. It is about meeting new people, making new friends and being part of a team that supports each other in common goals. For Sarah, Roy's mother, who coached him all of these years, it was a proud moment.

Roy is a role model and has made his country, his province and his community proud. On behalf of Canada, I say thanks and congratulations to Roy.

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PETER DEMARSH

Mr. T.J. Harvey (Tobique—Mactaquac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise with great sadness to honour the memory of Tobique—Mactaquac constituent and noted forestry advocate Peter DeMarsh. He was among the 18 Canadians who died in the Ethiopian Airlines flight 302 tragedy.

Peter was the chair of the International Family Forestry Alliance and president of the Canadian Federation of Woodlot Owners. A true steward of the environment, he was headed to Nairobi to speak at a conference about family-owned forests and climate change. I had the pleasure of meeting with Peter on many occasions over the last four years and always admired his devotion to the well-being of our planet and his dedication to his rural community and the production of small woodlots.

Peter was a proud New Brunswicker, a fearless and tireless advocate for the protection of small woodlots and a true community leader. My thoughts and prayers go out to Peter's family, friends, those who worked with him and all those affected by this great tragedy.

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● (1410)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been almost a month since China first blocked canola imports from a Canadian company. Since then, another company has had its licence revoked and China has ceased all purchases of Canadian canola. We know that Canada produces the highest quality of canola in the world.

This crisis is not about product. It is about politics and it requires immediate action to resolve it. Our farmers are paying for the Prime Minister's failure to handle Canada's relationship with China, but he has offered them no real assurances. This crisis is creating a lot of uncertainty, and if left unresolved, its impact will be devastating.

Statements by Members

Spring is here, bins across the Prairies are full of canola and seeding is right around the corner. Our farmers need to have confidence that their government is standing up for them on the world stage and they deserve answers from the Prime Minister.

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ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE

Mr. Neil Ellis (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as MP for the Bay of Quinte, it is an honour to rise in the House to mark the Canadian air forces' 95th anniversary of service to Canada and the world. My riding is home to Canada's largest air force base, CFB Trenton and boasts one of the largest veterans populations in the country.

The legacy of our air force members stretches back to 1924, when the service was known as the Royal Canadian Air Force. Now Trenton's National Air Force Museum shows off the RCAF's impact, especially in World War II, when it was the fourth-largest allied air force and training took place at the bombing and gunnery schools, No. 6 in Mountain View and No. 31 in Picton, and at the Central Flying School and the Flying Instructor Schools in Trenton.

Our 437 Transport Squadron at CFB Trenton continues to undertake vital air transports and air-to-air refuelling in some of the most challenging deployments abroad.

I invite all my honourable colleagues to recognize this important milestone and thank our CAF members and our veterans for their service.

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CANADA

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has come to our attention that there is a petition across the United States that calls on Canada to buy Montana for a trillion dollars. While we appreciate their interest, we would like to present our counter-offer.

We will annex Washington state, Oregon, California, New England and enough of New York to get the rest of Niagara Falls and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who, with her values, would be a pretty average Canadian. We will offer, in exchange, to take over Puerto Rico and make it a province, to provide the 74 million new immigrants created by this deal universal free health care, regardless of what they believe or wear, and to take Montana.

We believe that this is a fair deal that would also help compensate for our century-old reticence to accept the Turks and Caicos, which was a grave error, we now recognize. In that spirit, if they are not intending to help make Britain great again, we could also make room for Scotland in our Confederation

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CARBON PRICING

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to share a few excerpts from emails I have received in my office about the Liberal carbon tax.

The first is a letter I was copied on that was sent to the Prime Minister. It was sent from Bob Ward, a small business owner and an advocate for trade.

I fail to see your party's logic behind imposing a carbon tax. I certainly understand the theory but this tax will only fuel a climbing [consumer price index]. When will these additional taxes STOP? I don't know about you but my "money tree" died many years ago.

The second is from a senior living in my riding. She wrote, "As an ailing senior my concerns are...the cost of our utilities [and] having enough left over for food and clothing".

People in Canada are tired of being taxed. Today residents of Ontario are going to see prices at the pumps rise 4.5 cents. The government is making everything more expensive for all Canadians. This is not an environmental plan. This is a tax plan. It is that plain and simple. Canadians have grown tired of the government.

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THE BUDGET

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, budget 2019-20 builds on Canada's middle class, and it also supports our infrastructure. This is a government that has invested hundreds of millions of extra dollars in this budget to support municipalities in all regions of our country from coast to coast to coast, because we understand that by investing in Canadians and by investing in our infrastructure, we are going to have a healthier middle class. We are going to have a more prosperous economy in all regions of our country, and that is good for all of Canada.

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● (1415)

[*Translation*]

SHERBROOKE

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me tell you about my constituency, the wonderful riding of Sherbrooke. The city of Sherbrooke is a beacon of diversity. From our cultural backgrounds to the languages we speak, the religions we practice and even the way we look and the clothes we wear, the people of Sherbrooke are proud to be unique and diverse. I am proud to say that these differences are our strength; we celebrate and foster them.

Last week, as part of Action Week Against Racism, I attended the diversity gala hosted by SAFRIE, a support agency for refugee and immigrant families in the Eastern Townships. The hundreds of attendees took in artistic performances put on by many citizens of Sherbrooke from diverse backgrounds who were proud of their roots and happy to share their culture with their host community.

This week we are also celebrating movies from around the world at the Sherbrooke global film festival from April 4 to 11. Festival-goers are invited to experience movies differently, to discover the world through the eyes of movie makers from here and abroad, and to experience the diversity of the film industry.

Oral Questions

I invite my fellow Canadians to join me in celebrating Sherbrooke's diversity and experience what the world has to offer.

* * *

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have received many emails and telephone calls from constituents concerned about how the government's carbon tax, a tax that disproportionately affects rural Ontarians, will increase the cost of food, heating, transportation and consumer goods.

Here is what they are telling me: The Prime Minister has "implemented a seriously flawed carbon tax and tried to sell it with a sub standard tax credit".

Here is another: "another smoke screen in the process to fill government coffers."

Here is another: "This government seems to lack the veracity and transparency that [was]...promised at election time."

Here is one more: "Any faith voters had in Liberal government has been stretched to the limit like an elastic band—and I believe it is about to break and snap back".

This fall, Ontarians will have their chance to snap back at the ballot box and elect a government that will scrap this tax.

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TRANSGENDER DAY OF VISIBILITY

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past Sunday marked International Transgender Day of Visibility. March 31 is an important day to celebrate transgender people and to raise awareness of the discrimination faced by transgender people worldwide.

Trans individuals come from all walks of life. We must end the discrimination they face every day. Recognizing and celebrating this tremendous community does not begin or end with one day. As Canadians, we must challenge those who continue to oppress and discriminate against our fellow citizens. Diversity is our strength. We must treat each other with the compassion and respect we all deserve.

International Transgender Day of Visibility gives voice to those who have been forgotten or left behind. My hope is that we all take the time to reflect and think of the diverse experiences faced by our fellow Canadians every day. To trans Canadians and friends, we are and will always be their allies.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

JUSTICE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, new information revealed in the tapes last week prove that the Prime Minister has not been telling the truth. The Prime Minister not only had knowledge of the pressure being applied to the former attorney

general but he and his office were, in fact, orchestrating it. As the clerk said, the Prime Minister wanted his way, and he was going to get it.

I know I am not allowed to say that the Prime Minister lied, so my question is this. Why did the Prime Minister give deceitful and false information to Canadians regarding the pressure he and his office applied to the former attorney general?

The Speaker: As the hon. opposition House leader knows, members cannot do indirectly what they cannot do directly. I would ask her to be careful with that.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that Canadians be reminded that the Prime Minister gave unprecedented access to the former attorney general. He waived solicitor-client privilege as well as cabinet confidence. It is also important to note that the Prime Minister has taken responsibility for the breakdown of communication within his office as well as with the Clerk of the Privy Council.

It is important to note that the justice committee looked at this matter for over five weeks. It actually held meetings in public so that Canadians could hear. It is also important to note that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is currently studying this matter.

● (1420)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are not buying the ever-changing saga the Prime Minister is trying to peddle.

First of all, he said there is nothing to see here and all allegations are false. Second, we all heard that it is Scott Brison's fault. Now the blame is being placed, and was placed, on the former attorney general. It was all her fault for not saying "no" loudly and clearly enough to the Prime Minister. When we heard the tapes, and all of us heard, she said "no" to the Prime Minister.

Why does the Prime Minister not stop telling us his perspective and tell us the truth?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives will continue pointing fingers and trying to divide Canadians. What we know is that it is important for Canadians to be able to hear. That is exactly why the justice committee sat. They have members from both sides of the aisle on the committee. They set parameters, and within those parameters, they asked the former attorney general to appear.

For the entire time the former attorney general was the Attorney General, the Prime Minister gave unprecedented access to ensure that solicitor-client privilege was waived, as well as cabinet confidence, so that Canadians would hear directly from witnesses.

The justice committee actually studied this matter for over five weeks. The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is currently studying this matter.

Oral Questions

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was the Prime Minister who instructed the Liberal MPs on the justice committee and the ethics committee to shut down the investigation, and they complied. Now, after we heard the tapes just yesterday, guess who said he has more information to give? It is Gerald Butts.

It is clear that there is much more to this scandal and there is more information. It comes right from the Prime Minister and his office.

Will the Prime Minister allow his Liberal MPs on the justice committee to reopen this important investigation?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the members who sit on the justice committee will make those decisions for themselves.

What is clear is that by allowing submissions to committee, the system actually works. The former attorney general was at committee and testified that the rule of law in Canada is intact and that Canadians can have confidence in our institutions. This once again proves that the work committees do will continue to function.

The former attorney general was able to submit new information, as were others, and I think it is important that the committee gets to do its important work. Let us not undermine the work of our institutions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the interference scandal involving the Prime Minister and his office has been dragging on for over two months.

On day one, the Prime Minister outright denied everything. Then he changed his story from one week to the next. Audio recordings and written submissions were released on Friday, clearly confirming that the Prime Minister and his office interfered and tried to cover up a scandal involving a criminal prosecution.

What new version will the Prime Minister give us today? Will he finally tell Canadians the truth?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are telling Canadians the truth. That is exactly why the members who sit on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights asked to hear from the witnesses. The witnesses appeared, and now all the facts are publicly available. It is important that Canadians be able to hear from themselves. The Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence so that witnesses could appear before the committee and share their testimony.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister refuses to hold a public inquiry. He refuses to testify before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. He refuses to let all the relevant witnesses speak freely. The allegations of interference came from Liberal members. We did not make anything up. The allegations came from Liberals who are currently sitting in the House. All we ask is that privilege be waived so that we can get to the bottom of this business.

Seeing as Gerald Butts has more documents to submit, will the Prime Minister let the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights find out the whole truth?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence so that Canadians could hear the truth. Nothing related to this matter was off limits. The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights got exactly what it asked for.

It is clear that the Conservatives are going to keep ignoring what the witnesses have to say. We on this side of the House respect our institutions and always will.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, everything the Prime Minister has been saying for the past couple of months has been contradicted in the past 72 hours by an audio recording that was made public of a conversation on the SNC-Lavalin scandal involving the Prime Minister. The very principles of our democratic traditions are at stake, including the rule of law, the independence of our judicial system and the very principle of equality before our national institutions. The Prime Minister has lost all credibility. We need a public inquiry.

Will the government launch a public inquiry?

• (1425)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the members who sit on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights have studied the matter. Just as the committee members requested, the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence so that the former attorney general could give her testimony. We know that the committees are doing their work. We know that the Ethics Commissioner is doing his job because an investigation is under way.

We will respect their work. The NDP must know that it was someone from their own party who requested more documents. That is exactly why the former attorney general provided them.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this scandal is not going away. Every day, there is fresh evidence that the Prime Minister and his chief advisers misled this House and misled Canadians. No evidence so far has been as compelling and as devastating to the Prime Minister's case as the audio recording that Canadians heard this weekend. The Prime Minister should stop hiding or trying to talk his way out of this. He needs to do the right thing. Will he come clean with Canadians by calling a public inquiry now?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the justice committee sat and had witnesses appear. At every step, the opposition members, including the New Democrats, said that the committee would not meet and witnesses would not appear. They said that the former attorney general would not be able to speak and share her story. The Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege, as well as cabinet confidence, to ensure that Canadians could hear everything that they should get to hear, because we believe that is exactly how it should be.

Oral Questions

The former minister also confirmed that she had nothing further to offer a formal process. That is within her testimony, and we know that all facts are now on the table.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday the Prime Minister and his Liberal Party friends laughed at the members of Grassy Narrows First Nation as they were thrown out of an exclusive fundraiser. They had no other chance to ask him directly for justice after decades of mercury poisoning in their community.

Apologies from the Prime Minister are not good enough anymore. Chief Rudy Turtle does not accept the Prime Minister's apology, because his community needs actions and not words. Will the Prime Minister commit to visiting Grassy Narrows immediately?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her question and for her advocacy. The people of Grassy Narrows have suffered for generations. We continue to work with the community and support its needs, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to build a health facility in the community. The minister is looking forward to meeting with Chief Turtle to determine how we can continue moving this critical work forward. It is imperative that the Government of Canada, the province and the community all work together to ensure that the people of Grassy Narrows get the support they need, which they did not get for 10 years under that government that is doing all the heckling.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they expect better. The members of Grassy Narrows First Nation are asking for justice after decades of mercury poisoning in their community.

Last week, the Prime Minister made fun of them as they were being escorted out of his fundraiser. That is not leadership. Leadership is engaging with people, going to Grassy Narrows and seeing what these families are going through and keeping one's promises. The Prime Minister's apologies are no longer enough.

Will he commit to visiting Grassy Narrows immediately?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the residents of Grassy Narrows have suffered for generations. We continue to work with the community to meet their needs and fulfill our promise to build a health facility in the community.

The minister would be pleased to meet with Chief Turtle to determine how we can continue to advance this crucial work.

* * *

• (1430)

[English]

JUSTICE

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister told Canadians that no one ever raised concerns with him about his many attempts to interfere in the criminal prosecution of

SNC-Lavalin, but the recorded phone call and text messages released last week prove that this is blatantly false.

The former attorney general repeatedly told the Prime Minister and his top officials that their actions were "entirely inappropriate". Both his top political adviser and top public servant have resigned in disgrace. When will the Prime Minister stop changing his story and tell Canadians the truth?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we believe that Canadians should get to hear exactly what is taking place. That is why all justice committee meetings took place in public, and that is also why the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege, as well as cabinet confidence, to ensure that when witnesses appeared they would be able to share their testimony.

Canadians are listening and are able to engage. We know that additional documents have been provided that actually substantiate and confirm exactly what the testimony had been thus far. It shows that the system is working and that people are able to submit documents, and that is exactly how it should work.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister did not fully remove the restraints, and new information and evidence have been submitted to the committee, so clearly its work is not done. The Prime Minister also told Canadians to heed Michael Wernick's words and, oh, we did. The recording proves that Wernick threatened the former attorney general if she did not do the Prime Minister's bidding and stop the independent criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin.

Clearly, the Prime Minister knew all along and directed the coordinated campaign to bully the former attorney general to interfere, and he was told it was wrong over and over. When will the Prime Minister finally tell Canadians the truth?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government gave unprecedented waivers so that the information could be shared in public so that Canadians could hear directly for themselves. Nothing related to the matter was off limits. The waiver actually covered the entire time of the former attorney general's entire term, and it covered the whole period during which the allegations were made.

Members who sit on the justice committee set parameters for the study to ensure that the study would be able to be done to its best. The Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege, as well as cabinet confidence, so that Canadians could hear exactly for themselves.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister asked Canadians to listen to Michael Wernick and we did that. He also said that the former attorney general did not relay her concerns about negotiating a remediation agreement with SNC-Lavalin. We now know that she did so several times. Canadians have not been fooled and know that the Prime Minister has no credibility on this file.

When will the Prime Minister stop changing his story and tell Canadians the truth?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government waived cabinet confidence and solicitor-client privilege so that those with information could talk about it openly. That is unprecedented. Nothing related to this matter was off limits.

The waiver covered the former attorney general's entire term of office. That was the period of time during which the allegations were made. All the facts are now public.

The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is continuing his work. A file has been opened.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government controlled the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. The Liberals heard what they wanted to hear. The opposition wanted to hear from 11 witnesses, but its request was denied.

I am not sure the Prime Minister understands how dangerous it is to abuse our justice system. This is not a dictatorship. This is a nation governed by the rule of law.

Now that two ministers, the Prime Minister's top adviser and the country's top civil servant have resigned, are we really supposed to believe nothing happened?

The Liberals have to stop deceiving Canadians. People want to know the truth.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians need to be able to hear the truth, and that is exactly why the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence. That is also why witnesses can appear and testify.

Canadians had the opportunity to tune in to all the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights meetings because they were public. Liberal members of the justice committee are doing their job. Clearly, the Conservatives are doing their leader's bidding and still think that is the only way to operate.

[English]

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in February the Prime Minister said, "I would recommend that people pay close heed to the words of the clerk of the Privy Council."

Last Friday, Canadians did just that, when they heard the clerk carrying out orders from the Prime Minister, pressuring the former attorney general to cut SNC-Lavalin a special deal. The tape makes it clear that political interference in an ongoing criminal proceeding was happening at the highest levels of the government. The tape does not lie.

Why does the Prime Minister not start telling the truth?

• (1435)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were able to hear the truth, and that is exactly why justice committee members were able to have their meetings in public. That is a decision they took, and that is what took place.

The Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege, as well as cabinet confidence, because Canadians do deserve to be able to hear the truth. It is also important to note that the former attorney general said that the rule of law in Canada is intact, and that the rule of law was followed.

The Prime Minister recognizes that we can always improve our institutions, and that is why he accepted responsibility for the breakdown of communication and trust within his office. We have put in measures to move forward in an even better way. We will continue to deliver for Canadians.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the tape makes it clear that the Prime Minister was demanding a special deal for SNC-Lavalin. We heard the clerk clearly when he said that the Prime Minister "is gonna find a way to get it done one way or another" and that "he is in that kinda mood".

The tape removes all doubt that there was a coordinated campaign to interfere in an ongoing criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin, and that the Prime Minister himself was orchestrating it.

In light of this damning new evidence, will the Prime Minister finally end the cover-up and start telling the truth?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to ensure that Canadians can hear the truth is exactly why justice committee members had their meetings in public. That is exactly why the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege, as well as cabinet confidence.

It is also important to note that the Prime Minister, as well as the Clerk of the Privy Council, in that same recording, confirmed that this was a decision for the former attorney general to make. They confirmed, within that same recording, that those were tools that were available only to the former attorney general. What we know is that the former attorney general made a decision, and that decision remains the case today.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I would ask the hon. opposition House leader and others not to be speaking when someone else has the floor.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

*Oral Questions***INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we can tell a lot about a man by what he thinks is funny: Witness the Prime Minister using Grassy Narrows to be the butt of his jokes for his rich friends at the Laurier Club.

Mercury poisoning is a nightmare. I have seen the effects of Minamata disease on children in Grassy Narrows. Grassy Narrows survivors had to pay top dollar to the Liberal Party to even get close to getting to the Prime Minister, and he thinks this is funny.

Does the Prime Minister understand that he has shown a fundamental lack of moral compassion and leadership?

Mr. Dan Vandal (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is steadfast in our commitment to build a new health facility in Grassy Narrows. We continue to work with the community to support its needs.

The minister is looking forward to meeting Chief Turtle to determine how we can continue to move forward on this important issue. It is imperative we all work together, the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario and the community, to ensure that the people of Grassy Narrows get the supports they need.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they deserve better than cheap laughs from the Prime Minister, the frat boy.

He promised the people of Grassy Narrows that he would clean up that river, and he broke that promise. However, he keeps his promises to his friends at the Laurier Club, which is why he sent Michael Wernick in to push 17 times in 17 minutes to get the former attorney general to overturn the SNC investigation: “Thank you for your donation” to the Liberal Party, even if it is an illegal donation.

What happened to the Prime Minister's promise of ethical and moral government?

Mr. Dan Vandal (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the work that we have done as a government. Since being elected in 2015, we have found \$17 billion, new dollars, to invest in education, in the environment, in infrastructure. We have removed 81 long-term drinking water advisories.

That party over there committed to balancing the budget at all costs. Thank God that Canadians saw differently and elected us.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, confidential information about an individual's candidacy to the Supreme Court was reported by the media.

Let's be clear. The fundamental purpose of that media leak was to have Canadians believe that the relationship between the Prime Minister and his former attorney general began to fray some time ago.

There is every reason to believe that the source of the leak is the Prime Minister in an effort to launch a smear campaign, but in doing so he wilfully tarnished the reputation of Manitoba Justice Glenn Joyal.

Will the Minister of Justice launch an official investigation into this breach of confidentiality?

• (1440)

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proud of our process when it comes to not only selecting judges in Canada but also selecting judges for the Supreme Court of Canada. We will ensure that this continues in future and that we appoint highly qualified judges through transparent and reliable processes.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in an attempt to undermine the credibility of the former attorney general, the Prime Minister attacked the sitting chief justice of Manitoba. The former attorney general did not just pull his name out of a hat. It came from a list that was recommended by an independent panel. The Prime Minister does not respect the independence of our justice system, the confidentiality of the court appointment process or whose reputation he drags through the mud. The former justice minister has said that this leak was inappropriate. Will there be an investigation into who from the Prime Minister's Office did this leak?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are proud of our judicial appointment process both for superior courts across the country and for the Supreme Court of Canada. One of the reasons we had to fix it was precisely because Prime Minister Harper was in conflict with the chief justice of Canada at the time.

We have done better. We have a process that is full of integrity and we are going to continue forward in that direction.

The Speaker: Order. I am having trouble hearing the questions and the answers.

The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the justice minister just besmirched the appointment process for all justices. It is shocking that the Prime Minister thinks that he is above the law, whether it is pressuring his own Attorney General to influence the independent prosecutor or leaking details to damage the reputation of a sitting judge. This Prime Minister's government is corrupt. Canada's legal community, the OECD and Transparency International have serious concerns about the Prime Minister's scandals.

Will the Liberals launch an investigation into this leak, yes or no?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have stated on numerous occasions, we have confidence in our institutions, and that is why we know that committees can do their work.

Oral Questions

When it comes to one of the matters that the member has referenced, the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is investigating this matter. We know that there is an ongoing court case. The former attorney general, in her appearance at committee, confirmed that the rule of law in Canada is intact and that the law was followed at all times.

We recognize that we can always strengthen and improve our institutions, and that is why this government has taken measures to ensure that we continue working hard and raising the bar so that we deliver for Canadians.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know why this is always so difficult for the Liberals here.

Last week, the Manitoba Bar Association issued a very scathing statement regarding the confidentiality of the judicial selection process by the compromising of Chief Justice Joyal's recommendation. Now this serious breach of confidentiality under the Liberals has violated that justice's privacy and undermined Canadians' confidence in our judicial process.

Why is it so difficult for him to do the right thing, contact the Privacy Commissioner and get an investigation on this? That is what should be done. It should not be that difficult.

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have put into place a judicial appointment process across Canada for both the Supreme Court as well as for superior court justices that is unparalleled in its rigour, its transparency and in outcomes. We have appointed outstanding judges, over 260 since we took office, and we will continue to do that.

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AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, families in Windsor will pay the price because Liberals again refuse to fight for them. Fiat Chrysler will eliminate the third shift at the Windsor assembly plant, which is 1,500 jobs plus the suppliers. The Prime Minister has done nothing to implement a national auto strategy. In every opportunity he had to save the manufacturing sector, he chose to abandon it.

When will the Prime Minister finally stand up for Canadian workers and implement a national automotive manufacturing strategy and protect jobs?

• (1445)

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were very disappointed to hear about the news in Windsor. We know how difficult the FCA third-shift shutdown is for the workers and their families. That is why I immediately visited the leadership of FCA in Windsor, along with the Unifor leadership, to talk about what we can do to protect these jobs. Our government has been very clear about supporting the automotive sector. We have invested in 40 different projects that have helped leverage 6 billion dollars' worth of investments since 2015, and we will continue to support the automotive sector.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Chrysler is investing \$4.5 billion in Detroit, creating 6,000 jobs. GM is

investing in Michigan, creating thousands of jobs. Meanwhile, GM Oshawa is closing, losing thousands of jobs. Windsor is losing jobs in the thousands, and in Brampton, hundreds of jobs. These automakers are investing in the future, just not here in Canada. The minister left \$800 million in a fund from last year's budget while opportunity escaped and others beat him to a new, cleaner greener auto jobs plan.

Will the minister finally turn around a losing record and make sure that the Windsor assembly plant has a new product?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I fundamentally disagree with the member opposite. If we look at the track record of the previous Conservative government under Stephen Harper, it lost 30,000 jobs in the automotive sector before the recession. In the first three years of our government, there were 6,000 new jobs in the automotive sector. More importantly, we have put forward a fund of \$2 billion, the strategic innovation fund, that has been used by the automotive sector to help leverage 6 billion dollars' worth of investments here in Canada. We always have and always will defend the automotive sector and the auto workers.

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[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tax evasion is still a concern for Canadians, which is why our government has invested more than \$1 billion to equip the Canada Revenue Agency to combat tax fraud.

April 3 marks the third anniversary of the first reports on the Panama papers. The Minister of National Revenue has already informed us that the CRA identified 894 Canadians in this information leak.

Can the minister give us an update on the CRA's investigation into the Canadians identified?

Hon. Diane Lebouthillier (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Thérèse-De Blainville for his excellent question and for his ongoing interest in addressing tax evasion.

Our government has indeed invested nearly \$1 billion to equip the Canada Revenue Agency to combat tax fraud. I am pleased to inform the House that, last week, the Canada Revenue Agency carried out two search warrants in connection with the Panama papers in an alleged case of tax evasion in the amount of \$77 million.

Our plan is working. We are starting to see results and the net is tightening.

JUSTICE

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, we heard new evidence from the former attorney general that clearly showed that the Prime Minister carried on a campaign to politically interfere in the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin. We still have a lot of questions to ask.

In October, PMO adviser Mathieu Bouchard said, “We can have the best policy in the world but we need to get re-elected.”

What did he mean by that?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that Canadians need to hear the truth. That is exactly why the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence so that witnesses could share their testimony in committee. Meetings were held for five weeks, giving Canadians the opportunity to hear for themselves what those witnesses had to say.

What is clear is that the Conservatives made a decision before the members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights decided to discuss this case. They do not want to hear the truth. It is up to them to decide.

[English]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems like we are hearing new truths coming every day that would warrant the justice committee to investigate further. Liberals are saying that there is nothing new on this SNC scandal, but last week we heard substantial new evidence from the former attorney general, and Gerald Butts has also tabled new evidence with the committee.

Clearly the justice committee's investigation was not complete. Canadians still want answers to questions like, what did the Prime Minister's chief of staff mean when she said that she did not want to debate legalities anymore?

• (1450)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that Canadians be able to hear for themselves, and, once again, that is exactly why the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege as well as cabinet confidence. This is an unprecedented action that took place, because the Prime Minister recognizes it is important for Canadians to be able to hear for themselves. These committee meetings took place in public and Canadians were able to hear them. Members of the committee asked for additional documents to be submitted and those documents have now been submitted. That once again confirms that the system is working and that Canadians can have confidence in the system.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's staff said, “it's just a bit ironic that she wants an alternative justice process to be available in one sense, but not one for SNC.” It seems like the entire Liberal government has been seized with getting bribery charges dropped against SNC. As a little reminder, that included \$30,000 for Gadhafi's son for prostitutes in Canada.

Oral Questions

The finance minister believes that this company should get a special deal. I have a simple question: Will the Liberals let him come to the justice committee and explain to Canadians why?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the justice committee studied this matter over five weeks, which is longer than most pieces of legislation are even studied at committee. We know that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is currently investigating this matter. We know that there is an ongoing court case. We know that when it comes to deferred prosecution agreements, this is a new tool that went through the House of Commons, was voted on and it is a legal measure that can be considered.

What is interesting is that we hear this sanctimony from the other side, but where was that member from the Conservative Party when it voted against measures for women and gender programs, when it voted against programs for seniors and when it voted against—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals continue to spin, spin, spin and the truth keeps on putting them down. We heard more shocking evidence from the former attorney general that affirmed her testimony, which the Prime Minister desperately tried to discredit. The Liberals are saying that there is nothing new on the SNC-Lavalin scandal, but Gerry Butts sent new evidence to the justice committee to attack the former attorney general's credibility yet again.

There are plenty of unanswered questions and Canadians deserve answers. Here is a simple one for the Prime Minister: When will the Prime Minister end the cover-up?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us try this again, and I will try to keep it very simple.

Members who sit on the justice committee, and there are members from all parties who are recognized in this House and who sit on the justice committee, came together and set parameters when it came to the allegations currently being challenged or attacked by the opposition member. Then the justice committee was able to ask witnesses to appear and witnesses appeared. To ensure that Canadians could hear the truth, the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege as well as cabinet confidence for the entire time for which the allegations were being challenged.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian canola sector, which employs over 250,000 Canadians and contributes \$26.7 billion to the Canadian economy, is under attack, having been wrapped up in the Liberal government's dispute with China. Last week, the agriculture committee convened an emergency meeting to address this crisis. Shamefully, the Liberals blocked the ministers from being questioned.

Oral Questions

Our canola farmers deserve answers. What assurances can the minister provide farmers that Liberals are resolving this crisis for Canada's most valuable agricultural commodity?

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I completely understand the worries of our farmers. I was in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba last week and the week before to speak with farmers and stakeholders. I can assure members that it is a very high priority for our government. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is having discussions with its counterparts in China and we are working on finding a science-based solution.

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Liberals blocked the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food from inviting ministers to testify about the canola crisis.

The canola sector contributes over \$26.7 billion to Canada's economy and supports more than 250,000 jobs nationwide.

Our canola farmers should not pay the price for the Liberals' mishandling of the dispute with China. Our farmers are entitled to straight answers.

Since the Liberals do not want to invite the ministers to testify before the committee, what is their game plan for truly defending agriculture and ending the canola crisis?

• (1455)

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take the canola crisis and the discussions with China very seriously. I have been travelling around western Canada over the past few weeks, meeting with farmers, our partners and our provincial counterparts. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is working with its Chinese counterpart. Furthermore, the Minister of International Trade Diversification and I will be appearing before the Standing Committee on International Trade tomorrow afternoon.

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[English]

JUSTICE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said on February 15 that if anyone, including the Attorney General, had issues with anything they might have experienced in the current government, it was their responsibility to come forward and her responsibility to come forward, and no one did.

Now we have audio recordings in which she in fact did come forward and said, seven times in 17 minutes, that his interference was inappropriate. Does the Prime Minister really expect us to believe he did not know about that conversation?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that the Prime Minister has taken responsibility for the breakdown in communications and trust within his office and has put measures in place, because we always believe that we can strengthen our institutions and the way we work on behalf of Canadians.

It has also been stated that the Prime Minister was not briefed by the clerk on his conversation with the former attorney general and minister of justice. The Prime Minister also stated that he should have spoken directly with the former minister about this matter.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only problem with that story is that the Clerk of the Privy Council said to the former attorney general at the time that he would be reporting back to the Prime Minister the substance of the conversation they were having. In that conversation, she warned the clerk no less than seven times that the actions of the Prime Minister and the clerk were totally inappropriate.

Now the Prime Minister expects us to believe he did not know a thing about that. How is that possible?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to ensure that Canadians would be able to hear for themselves, the Prime Minister actually waived solicitor-client privilege as well as cabinet confidence. The Prime Minister also made sure, and it was encouraged, that members of the justice committee would ask witnesses to appear so that Canadians could judge and hear for themselves.

I know members opposite cannot fathom that members of a committee could do the work on their own because they are so used to being instructed by their leader, but that is not the approach we take on this side. We think it is important that we respect our institutions, including committees, and the work of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister sent out the clerk to claim that he never told the Prime Minister about this spectacular telephone conversation that we have now heard through audio recordings. The clerk claims that is because the Prime Minister went on vacation the very next day.

We now know that was not true. He did not leave for a vacation for two more days, and the clerk has testified that the Prime Minister, notwithstanding vacations, is always available 24-7.

Is the Prime Minister really going to expect us to believe that he would not have known about this explosive conversation?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member picks and chooses his points, says what he wants to say and listens to what he wants to hear. We know that Canadians are paying attention and should be able to hear the truth for themselves. That is exactly why the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege as well as cabinet confidence so that the former attorney general could appear at committee.

Members of the justice committee asked for additional documents to be presented, and those documents have now been presented. Within that same audio recording, the clerk also confirmed that the Prime Minister said that these were tools and decisions for the former attorney general to take. The former attorney general took a decision and it remains a decision.

*Oral Questions***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, climate change is real and the cost of inaction is enormous. It is disappointing that while climate change is having a real impact on the health and well-being of Canadians, the Conservatives still do not have a plan to protect our environment. If they do not have a plan on climate change, they do not have a plan for the economy or for the future.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment please advise this House of the actions our government is taking to fight climate change?

• (1500)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her question and for her continued advocacy to protect our environment. As of today, it is no longer free to pollute in Canada. The great news is that in her province, eight out of 10 families will actually be better off as a result of the climate action incentive that they will claim on their taxes each year.

The fact is that during the next federal election, Canadians are going to have a choice between a government that takes climate change seriously or Conservative politicians like the Leader of the Opposition or Doug Ford, who have buried their heads in the sand.

It may be April Fool's Day, but the biggest joke on the Hill is their climate plan.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister told Canadians to listen to Michael Wernick. We did, and last week we heard new evidence that further proves that the Prime Minister directed a coordinated campaign to stop the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin, thereby interfering with the prosecutorial discretion of the former attorney general.

When will the Prime Minister stop changing his story and start telling the truth?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it was stated at committee that the rule of law in Canada is intact, that Canadians can have confidence in their institutions and that the rule of law was followed.

The Prime Minister recognizes that we can always improve and strengthen our institutions. That is why he acknowledged that there was a breakdown of communication and trust within his office and has put measures in place to ensure that, moving forward, we have even stronger systems in place.

The Prime Minister also acknowledged that he should have spoken directly with the former minister on this matter. It is important to note that the Conservatives are picking and choosing, but we should look at all the facts.

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over 22 million Yemeni are suffering immensely because of the conflict that has been raging there for four years. The Liberals announced \$46.7 million in aid for Yemen in February.

Meanwhile, in 2016, Canada authorized the export of 15 billion dollars' worth of light armoured vehicles to Saudi Arabia and the sale of 500 million dollars' worth of other weapons, which are being used to create a blockade in various ports, thereby preventing humanitarian aid from reaching the people of Yemen.

What is the point of offering humanitarian aid with the left hand if the right hand is making it impossible for that aid to reach civilian populations?

[English]

Ms. Pamela Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government supports the peace talks in Yemen. We call on parties to fully implement their commitments and to bring peace to the people of Yemen. We call for full access to humanitarian aid. We have announced additional millions to go directly toward saving people's lives in Yemen, as was referred to.

Our government has also a UN motion mandating the UN human rights commissioner to send investigators to Yemen to investigate crimes against humanity.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, many rural communities across Canada are experiencing an infrastructure deficit after 10 years of neglect by the Harper Conservatives. For small communities, support from a higher level of government is absolutely essential to getting crucial infrastructure built.

[Translation]

Could the Minister of Rural Economic Development update the House on recent actions our government has taken to help rural communities across the country fill the infrastructure gaps?

Hon. Bernadette Jordan (Minister of Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question.

[English]

Our government understands that rural municipalities are eager to get infrastructure projects done, and we know how important it is for them to have a dependable, co-operative partner in the federal government. That is why in budget 2019 we introduced a top-up of \$2.2 billion, which will flow directly to municipal governments to get their infrastructure projects under way.

Oral Questions

While Conservatives across the country continue to show disrespect for municipalities, our government remains a dependable partner for rural communities.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after hearing the tape last Friday, Canadians were able to get a clear picture of just how far the Prime Minister and his operatives were willing to go to stop the criminal proceedings against SNC-Lavalin. In fact, he—he being the Prime Minister—was quite determined on this, as Michael Wernick said on the tape to the former attorney general.

The Prime Minister has changed his story several times, and we have reached the point where he needs to speak the truth to real power, the real power being the people of Canada. When will the Prime Minister come clean and finally tell Canadians the truth?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians deserve to hear the truth, and that is exactly why the justice committee was meeting in public. That is exactly why the Prime Minister waived solicitor-client privilege as well as cabinet confidence for the period in which the justice committee determined parameters for their study of this matter. These meetings took place in public so that Canadians could judge for themselves.

The Conservatives will continue to speculate and to pick and choose points, but we have confidence that Canadians are able to see all of the facts because they are all on the table and they are all in public.

* * *

• (1505)

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec government has finally decided to set clear guidelines to protect secularism. Quebec believes that the best way to protect all religions is for the state to have no religion. However, the secularism bill had not even been introduced and the Prime Minister was already attacking it.

Will the Prime Minister promise to respect the will of Quebec and not undertake any legal challenges of Bill 21?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has always defended the fundamental rights of each and every Canadian and it will continue to do so. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects the rights of all citizens. We cannot choose which to protect and which to limit.

Our position is clear. The state must not dictate what people can or cannot wear, regardless of their beliefs.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when I hear that it is clear to me that the government does not care about Quebec. If it did, it would know that we have been thinking about secularism since the Quiet Revolution. This is nothing new.

To the Prime Minister, Quebec's secularism legislation is discriminatory. He said, "It's unthinkable to me that in a free society we would legitimize discrimination against citizens based on their religion."

The opposite is true. This is an anti-discrimination bill since the rules apply to everyone.

Will the Prime Minister promise not to challenge Bill 21 in court?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is a secular country. That is reflected in all our institutions. Government employees have the right to express their faith and no one should have to choose between a job and the right to wear a religious symbol. We all have a responsibility to protect fundamental rights. Any initiative that erodes those rights is unacceptable. Canada is open, inclusive and rich in diversity.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, all I understood from that answer is that Canada is anything but secular.

We know that the Prime Minister has already made up his mind and put the Quebec government on notice. He said that everybody knows he will defend the Canadian charter and that Mr. Legault and all Quebecers know that his position on this is very firm.

Is that a threat?

Will the government respect the will of Quebec and agree not to file or fund any legal challenges to Bill 21?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Quebec only just tabled its bill. We are going to take some time before commenting on next steps.

That being said, as I just mentioned, we are the party of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and we will always stand up for the charter. No government should be making someone choose between their job and their religious symbols.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of members to the presence in our gallery of a former member of the House of Commons, former federal minister, former occupant of the chair, and former premier of Quebec, the Hon. Jean Charest.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[English]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, I have a point of order arising from question period.

In answer to my question about the Prime Minister's cover-up of the SNC-Lavalin corruption scandal, the government House leader said that every meeting of the justice committee was held in public. I have a notice of meeting from March 19 that says the justice committee meeting was in camera, in other words behind closed doors. That is where it shut down the investigation into the SNC-Lavalin corruption scandal.

I would invite the House leader to correct the record and tell Canadians the truth—

• (1510)

The Speaker: Is the hon. member able to table the document with unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: Other than that, this appears to be debate. We will move on.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

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 14 petitions.

* * *

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICS COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: Pursuant to section 15(3) of the Conflict of Interest Code for Members of the House of Commons, it is my duty to lay upon the table the list of all sponsored travel by members for the year 2018 with a supplement that is provided by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

* * *

[Translation]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of a Canadian parliamentary delegation concerning its visit to Lebanon and Jordan from October 8 to 11, 2018.

[English]

I also have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation concerning its visit to the Republic of Croatia and the Czech Republic from January 12 to 19, 2019.

* * *

[Translation]

CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER OF CANADA

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 2018 byelections. This report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation of the Canada-France Interparliamentary Association

Routine Proceedings

respecting its participation at the visit of the executive to Paris and Lille, France, from October 22 to 25, 2018.

* * *

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 18th report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, entitled “Bill C-91, An Act respecting Indigenous Languages”. The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

While I am on my feet, I move:

That the House do now proceed to orders of the day.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1550)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 1276)

YEAS

Members

Aldag	Alghabra
Amos	Anandasangaree
Arseneault	Arya
Ayoub	Badawey
Bagnell	Bains
Baylis	Beech
Bendayan	Bennett
Bibeau	Bittle
Blair	Boissonnault
Bratina	Breton
Caesar-Chavannes	Carr
Casey (Charlottetown)	Chagger
Chen	Cormier
Cuzner	Dabrusin
Damoff	DeCoursey
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Dzerowicz
Easter	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Ellis
Erskine-Smith	Eyking

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Fergus	Finnigan	Finley	Fortin
Fisher	Fortier	Gallant	Garrison
Fragiskatos	Fraser (Central Nova)	Généreux	Genoux
Freeland	Fuhr	Godin	Gourde
Garneau	Gerretsen	Harcastle	Harder
Goldsmith-Jones	Goodale	Hughes	Jeneroux
Gould	Graham	Johns	Jolibois
Hajdu	Hardie	Kelly	Kent
Harvey	Hébert	Kitchen	Kmiec
Hehr	Hogg	Kusie	Laverdière
Holland	Housefather	Leitch	Liepert
Hussen	Hutchings	Lloyd	Lobb
Iacono	Joly	Lukiwski	MacGregor
Jones	Jordan	MacKenzie	Maguire
Jowhari	Kang	Martel	Masse (Windsor West)
Khalid	Khera	McCauley (Edmonton West)	McColeman
Lambropoulos	Lametti	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound)
Lamoureux	Lapointe	Motz	Nantel
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)	Lebouthillier	Nater	Nicholson
Lefebvre	Levitt	O'Toole	Paul-Hus
Lightbound	Lockhart	Paupé	Plamondon
Long	Longfield	Poillievre	Quach
Ludwig	MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Rankin	Raves
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)		Reid	Richards
May (Cambridge)		Sansoucy	Saroya
McCrimmon	McDonald	Schmale	Shields
McGuinty	McKay	Sopuck	Stanton
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McLeod (Northwest Territories)	Stetski	Strahl
Mendès	Medicino	Stubbs	Sweet
Mihychuk (Soeurs)	Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs)	Thériault	Tilson
Morrissey		Trost	Van Kesteren
Nassif	Murray	Viersen	Wagantall
Ng	Nault	Warkentin	Waugh
Oliphant	O'Connell	Wong	Yurdiga— 108
Paradis	Oliver		
Peterson	Peschisolido		
Picard	Petitpas Taylor		
Qualtrough	Poissant		
Rioux	Ratansi		
Rogers	Robillard		
Rota	Romanado		
Ruimy	Rudd		
Saini	Sahota		
Samson	Sajjan		
Sarai	Sangha		
Schiefke	Scarpaleggia		
Serré	Schulte		
Shanahan	Sgro		
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)	Sheehan		
Simms	Sikand		
Sorbara	Sohi		
Tabbara	Spengemann		
Tassi	Tan		
Vandal	Trudeau		
Vaughan	Vandenbeld		
Wilkinson	Virani		
Yip	Wilson-Raybould		
Zahid— 157	Young		

PAIRED

Members

Moore— 2

LeBlanc

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

The hon. Minister of Rural Economic Development is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Bernadette Jordan: Mr. Speaker, I am tabling the government's responses to Order Paper Questions Nos. 2223 to 2241.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable on a point of order.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, just before the vote, I was preparing to submit to the House an important question regarding an emergency debate on the canola crisis.

Unfortunately, because of the motion moved by the government, this emergency debate will not occur. I therefore seek the unanimous consent of the House to revert to applications for emergency debate so that the House can discuss the important canola crisis and Canadians can find out what is actually being done on this file.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable have the unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: No.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to respond to three questions of privilege that were raised—

The Speaker: Order, please. I wonder if the hon. member could wait until I hear from a couple of other hon. members on what I think may be related questions.

NAYS

Members

Aboultaif	Albrecht
Alleslev	Allison
Angus	Arnold
Barlow	Barrett
Barsalou-Duval	Beaulieu
Benson	Benzen
Bergen	Berthold
Bezan	Blaikie
Boucher	Boudrias
Brassard	Brousseau
Calkins	Cannings
Carrie	Chong
Choquette	Clarke
Clement	Cooper
Cullen	Davidson
Deltell	Diotte
Doherty	Dreeshen
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Dusseault	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast

I notice that the hon. opposition House leader wishes to rise on a previous question of privilege.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

PROCEEDINGS ON OPPOSED VOTE NO. 126

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to contribute to the question of privilege that was raised by the member for New Westminster—Burnaby regarding the recorded division on opposed vote no. 126 during this year's interim estimates.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, during that vote many Liberal members entered the House after the question was put by the Assistant Deputy Speaker. After an hour of points of order, the Chair invited members to come forward, be honest and declare whether or not they were in fact in the chamber when the question was put. If they were not, the Chair called upon those members to identify themselves and withdraw their votes.

A number of members did just that. They showed honesty and principle. However, many more members did not. This was in spite of being clearly seen entering the chamber after the question was put by the Speaker. I know Canadians have seen the video. In fact I have gotten messages they have sent me. Canadians saw what happened. All of us were here and saw what happened. If you check the video, Mr. Speaker, you will confirm what I am saying. I know that this is a point that was urged upon the Chair at the time as well.

At page 81 of the third edition of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, it refers to a ruling from Speaker Sauvé, who stated in that 1980 ruling:

...while our privileges are defined, contempt of the House has no limits. When new ways are found to interfere with our proceedings, so too will the House, in appropriate cases, be able to find that a contempt of the House has occurred.

One way of looking at what took place during the vote is to conclude that certain members had found a unique and a disturbing way to mislead the House deliberately, and in so doing interfered with the proceedings of the House. Normally we talk here about misleading the House in the sense of words spoken, but that is not the only way to mislead someone. In this case, it is a matter of misleading both through actions and inactions or omissions committed by members.

On page 15 of the 24th edition of *Erskine May*, a contempt is described as:

Generally speaking, any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results, may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

In the first instance, by standing up and voting despite not having heard the question read by the Chair, which everyone saw, including Canadians watching the camera, it is an act I contend be a contempt of the House.

To be sure, we are not talking about a one-off accidental or inadvertent error by someone who was not paying close attention to the vote. That has happened in this place and we all know it could happen. Members walk in, they realize they did not hear the vote and

Privilege

they tell the Speaker. That is not what we are talking about in this case.

As I said earlier, the House, in fact, was seized with an hour of points of order before and following the taking of the recorded division. It would, frankly, have been impossible for any member present at the time not to have been consciously aware of what was going on and what the live controversy was before the House.

The second element of which I am concerned about here is the inaction or the omission. By staying silent after being called upon by the Assistant Deputy Speaker, certain members have deliberately misled the House regarding the recorded division on opposed vote no. 126.

As a result, the records of the House on this vote are simply in error and, therefore, false. The records have been falsified through the inaction of these members who did not take the appropriate steps when prompted and called upon to do so. At page 82 of Bosc and Gagnon, falsifying the records of the House and deliberately misleading the House are both listed as offences treated as contempt.

This is a very serious matter that strikes at the very heart of our parliamentary system of democratic governance. The government may have actually lost a confidence vote that night. All of us who were here for that vote, including Canadians who witnessed it, saw it happen.

It is one thing to act and believe in the honour of all of us as members of Parliament, but if the House trusts our honour and then evidence comes forward that our honour was indeed not intact, the House, the Speaker and the office has an obligation to act on that.

● (1555)

It is one thing for a member to say that he or she is honourable, but if proof exists that he or she is not honourable as a member of Parliament, that cannot be ignored, nor should it ever be ignored. At page 82 of Bosc and Gagnon, falsifying the records of the House and deliberately misleading the House are both listed as offences and treated as contempt. This is a very serious matter. It strikes at the heart of our system and, as I said, the government may have actually lost a confidence vote that night.

I want to offer this citation from Beauchesne's. In the sixth edition at page 3, it talks of the basic principles of parliamentary law, which are "To protect the minority and restrain the improvidence or tyranny of the majority; to secure the transaction of public business in an orderly manner". It also states further down the same page that Canada is, in short, "a responsible Cabinet system with the assumption that there will always be a recognizable Government with a legislative programme. ...the system also presupposes an Opposition ready and willing to attack the Government in an attempt to have its legislation altered or rejected."

That should have produced results as a consequence of the votes on the interim estimates. Opposed vote no. 126 should have been rejected. Had opposed vote no. 126 occurred in an honourable, legal fashion, which should have happened, there is a very good chance that the estimate would have been rejected. Therefore, the supply bill based upon the interim estimates, Bill C-96, should have been altered accordingly before being disposed of by the House.

Privilege

There is ample evidence of this. There is ample evidence that the government blatantly disregarded the constitutional convention of prosecutorial independence when it sought to protect its corporate friends during the SNC-Lavalin affair. However, there is ample evidence that about 50 members misled the House. We all saw it in plain view. The cameras caught it in plain view, while the table saw it and the Deputy Speaker saw it. It was seen in plain view. That is now another cornerstone of our unwritten Constitution. The confidence convention is being undermined for Liberal interests.

During the votes on interim estimates the government attempted to interfere. If we do not take action, it will be successful at interfering with parliamentary law, the law that is supposed to secure our democratic principles and protect the House from the tyranny of a majority government, a government that we have currently seen use its majority to shut down the justice committee and now shut down the ethics committee. We now find that the majority government is rigging votes in the House of Commons to protect itself from losing the confidence of the House and having to face the verdict of Canadians at the ballot box.

As I said earlier, certain Liberal members have found a unique and disturbing way to try to mislead the House, which may have profound consequences and cannot be ignored. The government may have actually lost a confidence vote. However, since up until this moment there has been no accountability mechanism in place to deal with the actions of these members, the government appeared to have been able to dodge a bullet.

This is, Mr. Speaker, where we are asking for your intervention. Perhaps this question of privilege could serve as a means for accountability. If anything, it is certainly worthy of study at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Maingot's second edition of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, at page 227, suggests that:

In the final analysis, in areas of doubt, the Speaker asks simply:

“Does the act complained of appear at first sight to be a breach of privilege...or to put it shortly, has the Member an arguable point? If the Speaker feels any doubt on the question, he should...leave it to the House.”

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I ask that you find a *prima facie* case in response to the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

• (1600)

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of brief points that I wish to add to the opposition House leader's addition to the question of privilege raised by the member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

My point relates to another vote that took place that same evening, but the argument is the same and the circumstances are the same. Certain members have deliberately misled the House. In this case, they did not mislead the House with their words but through their votes. These members have refused to come forward and disqualify their votes on a substantial financial matter, which is indeed a confidence motion.

Page 225 of Joseph Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada* reads:

While privilege may be codified, contempt may not, because new forms of obstruction are constantly being devised and Parliament must be able to invoke its penal jurisdiction to protect itself against these new forms; there is no closed list of classes of offences punishable as contempt of Parliament.

My House leader has made the argument that deliberately misleading the House is an offence and that Liberal members may have misled the House during the votes on the interim estimates. I would add that certain members misled the House on the vote that took place under Motion No. 3, vote 5, which constitutes a new form of obstruction, an offence caught on tape.

I rose at the time after that vote on Motion No. 3 and mentioned this. Through my point of order, I gave notice at that time that certain members had clearly entered the chamber after the question was being read and no members on that side took that opportunity to reverse their votes. I add this point because it happened not just on the vote in question, raised by both the member for New Westminster—Burnaby and the opposition House leader, but it happened quite a bit earlier in the evening. This was not something that was new or had not happened before. There was precedent that evening of this behaviour and I ask you to look very closely at this. This is indeed a constitutional issue, and I ask for your wisdom in looking into this and coming back to the House.

• (1605)

STATEMENTS BY MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO MINISTER OF JUSTICE

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to respond to three questions of privilege that were raised in the week of March 18.

I will begin with the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby on March 18 with respect to answers given by the Minister of Justice and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice during question period on February 7 and 8, 2019.

In his speech, the hon. opposition member argued that on the aforementioned days, the minister and the parliamentary secretary stated that neither the Prime Minister nor his office exerted any pressure on the former attorney general with regard to deferred prosecution agreements, and that since the media reported a different version of the facts afterward, the minister and parliamentary secretary had misled the House.

On January 31, 2008, Speaker Milliken ruled on a similar question of privilege. The matter was raised following the release of information that contradicted the statement given in the House earlier by the then minister of national defence on the Afghan detainee policy. He said, “...any dispute regarding the accuracy...of a minister's response to an oral question is a matter of debate....”

This statement, which was also quoted in the NDP House leader's intervention, is echoed in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, which states on page 516:

In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in regard to a response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue. As such, these matters are more a question of debate and do not constitute a breach of the rules or of privilege.

Privilege

Furthermore, I would like to refer you to your predecessor's ruling of April 29, 2015. That ruling, which can be found on page 13198 of Debates, was about the appropriateness of the then minister of defence's response to a question pertaining to Canada's military involvement against Daesh. The former Speaker said:

...as your Speaker, I must take all members at their word. To do otherwise, to take it upon myself to assess the truthfulness or accuracy of Members' statements is not a role which has been conferred on me, nor that the House has indicated that it would somehow wish the Chair to assume, with all of its implications.

In the same decision, the former Speaker reminded the members of the following conditions for breach of privilege with regard to the misleading statements:

...first, the statement needs to be misleading. Second, the member making the statement has to know that the statement was incorrect when it was made. Finally, it needs to be proven that the member intended to mislead the House by making the statement.

As previously cited in the April 29, 2015, decision, the Speaker "must take all members at their word."

Finally, I would like to remind the House that in the ruling dated April 16, 2002, Speaker Milliken, while speaking about the broader concepts of freedom of speech and the presumption of truthfulness, said the following:

If we do not preserve the tradition of accepting the word of a fellow member, which is a fundamental principle of our parliamentary system, then freedom of speech, both inside and outside the House, is imperilled.

As such, I respectfully submit that this is a question of debate and as such does not constitute a *prima facie* question of privilege.

ALLEGED PROCESS USED TO DETERMINE LIBERAL CAUCUS MEMBERSHIP

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the second matter, I would like to address the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Perth—Wellington on March 22 with respect to an alleged violation of Section 49.8 of the Parliament of Canada Act.

My hon. colleague, in his statement, argued that the collective privilege of the House had been breached since it includes the right to regulate its internal affairs. In his argument, my counterpart across the way argued that the resignation from caucus of the hon. member for Whitby seemed to have been forced, insinuating that the member did not resign as much as was kicked out of caucus.

First, I would like to argue that the basis for the hon. member's question of privilege is flawed. The hon. member for Perth—Wellington stated, "I truly believe the hon. member for Whitby was, or was threatened to be, kicked out of the Liberal caucus...."

On the exact day that the member for Perth—Wellington rose on this question, a tweet from the hon. member for Whitby was tabled by the hon. member for Spadina—Fort York in a reply to this question of privilege. It stated, "Everything in this ridiculous point of order is false and you have no right to speak on my behalf." With this tweet, the hon. member for Whitby confirmed that her resignation from caucus was indeed voluntary and not forced, as alleged by the member across the aisle.

Second, on the question of the process by which the Liberal caucus takes decisions and its respect of the Parliament of Canada

Act, I would like to point out the criteria necessary to raise a question of privilege.

• (1610)

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, third edition, states on page 145 that:

The matter of privilege to be raised in the House must have recently occurred and must call for the immediate action of the House.

In his initial submission, the member for Perth—Wellington mentions that the members of the Liberal caucus have allegedly been deprived of their rights since the first caucus meeting following the 2015 election. The member goes as far as quoting an interview of the Canadian Press, dated November 2015, to try to support his claim. If the question at hand has been known since November 2015, I would argue that the requirement of timeliness in raising the matter has been greatly disregarded.

Furthermore, I would like to remind the hon. member opposite of your decision dated May 29, 2017. In this ruling on the adequacy of consultations with regard to the appointment of a Commissioner for Official Languages, you stated at page 11,558 of Debates:

The fact that, in this instance, the requirement for consultation is embedded in statute, rather than a rule of the House, does little to change the role of the Speaker in this respect. In fact, it adds an additional element in terms of the role of the Speaker: that of interpreting laws. On that front, there is a rich body of jurisprudence to confirm that the Speaker cannot adjudicate on the legality of matters, which, of course, would include whether or not specific provisions of a statute, such as the need for consultations, have been respected.

This statement echoes a ruling made on December 7, 1989, by Speaker Fraser on the subject of statutory requirements which stated:

While it may be a question for the courts to decide upon as to whether or not the law has been respected in this instance, it does not constitute a contempt of the House.

In summary, therefore, the issue raised is neither a question of privilege nor a contempt. It is rather a question of law, and consequently I cannot offer my opinion as to the merits of the case either as argued by the hon. member for Victoria or as rebutted by the Minister of Justice.

Consequently, for all the aforementioned reasons, I respectfully submit that this is a question of debate and, as such, does not constitute a *prima facie* question of privilege.

• (1615)

ALLEGED BREACH OF CAUCUS CONFIDENTIALITY

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, finally, the last matter I would like to address is the question of privilege raised by the hon. member for Flamborough—Glanbrook on March 22, 2019, with respect to an alleged breach of caucus confidentiality. My hon. colleague, in his statement, argued that since news articles came out following the March 20 caucus stating information stemming from the Ontario caucus of the Liberal Party, there was a leak, and therefore caucus confidentiality was breached.

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In his argument, the hon. opposition member argued that caucus confidentiality is the cornerstone of parliamentary life, with members of Parliament needing to be able to have frank and candid conversations among colleagues. I would like to remind the House of the Speaker's statement of March 22 that "...generally matters of caucus proceedings— and I said "generally"—are not matters for the Speaker to preside upon."

On a decision delivered on March 25, 2004, Speaker Milliken stated: "The crux of the matter for the Chair is not the leak of the information, but the publication of leaked information that was manifestly from a private meeting."

Finally, I would like to point out that the previous rulings cited by the hon. member for Flamborough—Glanbrook all pertain to occurrences of MPs being recorded without their knowledge, which is a completely different issue from what we are facing here. Consequently, I respectfully submit that this does not constitute a prima facie question of privilege.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member.

The hon. member for Calgary Shepard wishes to intervene, I think briefly, on the question of privilege of the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby.

ALLEGED INTERFERENCE IN VOTING RIGHTS OF MEMBERS

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is just to add to the opposition House leader. Many members, including you Mr. Speaker, know this.

I rose quite often during the supplementary estimates (B) voting to call out the members who were not in their seats and had not heard the question but had voted anyway. I just want to remind you, Mr. Speaker, of a ruling that you made that evening on the question. You said, "I have mentioned before that members must be in the chamber so that they can hear the question. The issue is whether members enter after the question has begun to be read."

Several times that evening, Speakers ruled in favour of points of order that members could not vote because they did not hear the question, since they had entered after we had begun voting, including in a clarification added by the Assistant Deputy Speaker on that same prolonged evening, who at the time said, "I would remind members that they have to stay in their seats until the results are announced. We will subtract those two votes from the results."

That was on a point of order I had made on two members who had not heard the question or not stayed in their seats until the results had been read.

It is fundamentally important, as you heard from other members of the House, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to add that for your consideration as well, because you did rule at the very beginning of the supplementary estimates (B) voting that in fact members had to be in the chamber and not entering the chamber once you, Mr. Speaker, had started reading the question.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Calgary Shepard as well as the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the government House leader, the hon. opposition House leader and the hon. member for Calgary Rocky Ridge for their interventions.

Now on a different point of order, I believe, the hon. member for Edmonton West is rising.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ACCURACY OF ANNEXES IN BUDGET 2019

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order regarding the government's tabling of new annexes for budget 2019. I would like to urge the Speaker to confirm that this time the tabled budget documents are not riddled with errors like those originally tabled in this House.

For example, page 310 of the online version of the budget from the Department of Finance's website shows that all of the totals for budget 2019 measures have been impacted by errors. Total spending is not \$41,258,000,000 as tabled, but actually \$41,411,000,000. A difference of \$153 million is clearly not a typo, as finance has stated, but a calculation error.

On the same page, under the line item "Other" in the budget for 2019-2020, spending is not \$2,177,000,000 as the tabled version says, but rather negative \$23 million, a difference of \$2.2 billion. Once again, this is not a typo, as the Minister of National Defence states, but a calculation error.

Further, finance seemingly missed an entire department receiving funding, the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP. The department is not even mentioned in the tabled version of the budget, period. Tables A2.11, A2.12, A2.13 and A2.14 were all impacted by these calculation errors.

The Minister of Finance has a department with hundreds and hundreds of analysts to look over these numbers, and yet it took my office, an office of just two people, one day to tear the numbers apart. I would like to ask the Minister of Finance to rise, reassure the House that the budget is indeed entirely accurate and, if not, perhaps let me know so I can do the math for him.

● (1620)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Edmonton West for his point of order. I am not sure that it is something that I can intervene on, but I will have a look at the matter and come back to the House if necessary.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

THE BUDGET

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FINANCE

The House resumed consideration of the motion that this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss the cover-up budget, as it is now being called by Canadians.

The Budget

The government introduced a budget with \$41 billion of brand new cash spending designed to paper over the SNC-Lavalin corruption scandal, a scandal that has engulfed the current government ever since the former attorney general revealed that the Prime Minister and a group around him carried out an intense campaign of political interference, hounding, bullying and inappropriate pressure in order to convince her to set aside criminal charges on SNC-Lavalin, a company facing over \$100 million worth of fraud and bribery charges.

When I began my speech, I started by pointing to numerous inconsistencies in the Prime Minister's story on this matter. I want to read a particular quote that is central to his defence.

When the scandal came to light, and after the former attorney general had resigned from cabinet over it, the Prime Minister said, "If anyone, including the former attorney general, had issues with anything they might have experienced in this government or didn't feel that we were living up to the high standards we set for ourselves, it was her responsibility to come forward. It was their responsibility to come forward, and no one did."

Gerald Butts then went before a parliamentary committee. In an attempt to discredit the former attorney general, he said that if she had such concerns about the way they were acting on the SNC-Lavalin prosecution, then why weren't they talking about this in September, in October, in November, in December?

The essence of the rhetorical question that the Prime Minister and his top staff have asked is this: If she had a problem with our political interference, why did she not say something? We now know that she did, and the Prime Minister's suggestion to the contrary is false.

We have audio recordings in which the former attorney general said this about the Prime Minister's personal interference to the Clerk of the Privy Council: "So we are treading on dangerous ground here."

She said, "This is a constitutional principle of prosecutorial independence. It is entirely inappropriate and it is political interference" and "decisions that are made by the independent prosecutor are their decisions."

She also said, "I can't even imagine [the former chief of the supreme court] feeling in any way, shape or form comfortable with interfering with the [independence of prosecutors.]" and "this is about the integrity of the prime minister and interference."

She stated, "There is no way that anybody would interpret this other than interference... this is going to look like nothing but political interference by the prime minister, by you, by everybody else that has been involved in this politically pressuring me to do this."

She also stated, "this is about interfering with one of our fundamental institutions. This is like breaching a constitutional principle of prosecutorial independence" and "it will be deemed political interference from day one".

She said, "But I am trying to protect the prime minister from political interference—perceived [political interference] or otherwise. ...what I am confident of is that I have given the prime minister

my best advice to protect him and to protect the constitutional principle of prosecutorial independence."

Again, she said, "this goes far beyond saving jobs, this is about the integrity of the prime minister and interference. There is no way that anybody would interpret this other than interference if I was to step in."

That is a list of eight, maybe more, warnings that the former attorney general gave to the Prime Minister's top public servant on December 19. However, two months later, the Prime Minister had the audacity to go before 35 million Canadians and say that she never once raised a single solitary complaint. He said that she never let him know at all that he was doing anything wrong. This conversation, had it not been recorded, would probably be denied right now. I think a lot of Liberals are attacking the former attorney general for recording that conversation. I think she did so knowing that the Prime Minister and his team would lie and deny if she did not have proof that the conversation occurred.

● (1625)

The Prime Minister said that he was never warned. However, not only is there this extensive audiotape that shows the former attorney general did warn the Prime Minister's clerk, the clerk made clear during that conversation that he would be talking to the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister was not going to be happy with all of her refusals to interfere with the criminal prosecution. He said that he was in a mood. He was going to get it done one way or the other.

In other words, the expectation that all of us get from listening to the audio of that conversation is that the outgoing Clerk of the Privy Council would immediately be bringing the results of the conversation to the Prime Minister. Since, he has denied knowing anything about this conversation. This is laughable. Not only was this issue of helping SNC avoid trial top of mind for the Prime Minister according to the clerk, he was calling the former attorney general about the issue on behalf of the Prime Minister. In other words, the Prime Minister would have been anxious to hear the results of that conversation.

In the last few days, the clerk has said that he would have told the Prime Minister about the conversation but everyone went on vacation right after it was done. Well, it only took a few minutes for the media to check the publicly available records to find out that the Prime Minister was not on vacation the next day or even the day after that.

Furthermore, we only have to go back to the Clerk of the Privy Council's own testimony before the justice committee wherein he said that anyone in the government can get a hold of the Prime Minister 24-7 just by calling his switchboard. Anybody who has ever used that switchboard will know that it is a magnificently powerful tool. It can find people anywhere that they might be hiding, including on vacation.

The Budget

However, we are left to believe that two months went by from the time that the clerk had this menacing conversation with the former attorney general, to February 15, when the Prime Minister would step out in front of 37 million Canadians and deny knowledge of any objections from the former attorney general. All that time would have gone by and not once would the Clerk of the Privy Council have gone to his boss to say that, by the way, he did speak to the attorney general as he asked, and she gave him more than a half a dozen very clear warnings that what we were doing was wrong. I find it hard to believe that conversation did not take place.

Now, the Prime Minister claims that it is all just a breakdown in communications, an erosion of trust. Well, this is an area where I will agree with the Prime Minister. When one looks 35 million to 37 million Canadians in the eyes and tells them something that is not true, an erosion of trust is an understatement.

Let me point to another one of these contradictions that we have witnessed with the Prime Minister and his top staff and their interventions.

Gerald Butts testified about the meeting that he and Katie Telford had with the chief of staff to the attorney general. This conversation was important, because it is recorded in the former attorney general's notes that top PMO staff were using very aggressive language to try to get the attorney general at the time to shelve those criminal charges on SNC-Lavalin. Gerald Butts speaks of that meeting defensively. He said, "The second and final meeting I had on the file was with Jessica Prince, the minister's chief of staff, and Katie Telford. There was no urgency to attend the meeting."

I remember that meeting very differently from the account given last week. I will repeat that. He said, "There was no urgency to attend the meeting." Well, that is funny, because a PMO staffer emailed Ms. Prince, and the subject line in the email is "Urgent: chat w/ Katie and Gerry".

● (1630)

One might, on the surface of it, say it is not terribly important whether a meeting is urgent or not urgent. However, when lies are thrown around like snowflakes and statements are expected to melt away and then evaporate into thin air, one comes to the conclusion very quickly that we cannot believe anything the Prime Minister and the people around him claim.

He specifically chose the sentence, saying that there was no urgency to attend that meeting, and then in the subject line to the meeting's invitation said, "Urgent: chat w/ Katie and Gerry". It further states, "Katie and Gerry would like to speak to you asap - before 5 pm today..". The email was sent at 4:16 p.m. That is not urgent at all: "I need to see you before 5 p.m., but that's okay, it's only 4:16 p.m." In other words, drop everything, and did we mention that it was urgent?

One wonders, with all of the things that Mr. Butts could have said before committee, why he would specifically say something that is demonstrably false and easily disprovable in the documentary evidence. It is as though he thought he could sit in that committee and state falsehood after falsehood because no one would be able to know what was true or untrue, that it was just a he said, she said.

The problem for Gerald Butts and the Prime Minister is that they were dealing with someone who is punctilious in keeping records, and when people have records, it is hard to lie about what happened. We are seeing that in this example and many others.

I will go back to the claim that the Prime Minister knew nothing of the former attorney general's concerns about his political interference. On September 18, the former attorney general met with the Prime Minister and said of that meeting, "...while looking him in the eye. I asked, 'Are you politically interfering with my role...as the Attorney General? I would strongly advise against it.'"

That was in September, and yet in February, the Prime Minister stood and said he did not know anything about her concerns, that she had never mentioned it to him, that it was funny how they walked past each other in the hallway every day and she did not think to mention it. We see one piece of documentary evidence after another showing that the Prime Minister stated blatant falsehoods.

I will move on to the next falsehood, one that numerous members of the government repeatedly stated in their efforts to secure a deferred prosecution agreement for SNC-Lavalin, and that is the claim that the headquarters of the company would imminently announce its departure from Montreal if the former attorney general did not immediately indicate her willingness to negotiate a deferred prosecution agreement. The Prime Minister, the clerk of the privy council and the former attorney general met in late September. At that meeting, the attorney general reported that they told her before the Quebec election even happened, the company would announce it was moving its headquarters, unless she were to initiate a deal to shelve the prosecution. The Quebec election was only two weeks away. In other words, if she were to have believed what they said, she would have been under the mistaken impression that she had to make this decision immediately in order to avoid losing a major corporate headquarters.

It turned out that threat was totally false, as borne out by the fact that it has not moved its headquarters. Furthermore, the company has signed an agreement with the Quebec pension plan that in exchange for a \$1.5 billion loan, the headquarters will remain in Montreal until at least the year 2024. By the way, it has signed a 20-year lease and announced a multi-million dollar renovation to accommodate its thousands of employees there. That does not sound like the actions of a company that is about to move its headquarters. Therefore, that statement they made to her about the immediate need for her to act to save the headquarters was utterly false.

Lying to a prosecutor or a top law officer in order to shelve criminal charges may well violate section 139 of the Criminal Code, which makes it an offence to attempt to obstruct, pervert or defeat the course of justice.

● (1635)

Telling a law officer a lie to get charges shelved sounds like someone is obstructing, perverting or defeating the course of justice, yet that is exactly what happened.

The Budget

I came to the House of Commons to ask the Prime Minister about this falsehood, and he denied ever having stated it. I was not in the room for that September meeting, so I could not say what was said there, but we have scrupulous notes from the former attorney general, and we have the fact that the Prime Minister went into the press theatre and repeated exactly the same falsehood several months later. He publicly went on the record and said that the headquarters might leave if the company did not avoid prosecution. What the former attorney general claims the Prime Minister said in that meeting was the same as what he then said publicly. In other words, he has been peddling this falsehood in both private and in public.

I am not surprised that the Prime Minister did not remember that he had said it, because it is much harder to remember what we say if we are not telling the truth. When we tell the truth, we just have to hearken back to what actually happened. When we tell falsehoods, our memory has to keep track of a whole multiplicity of different versions of events, and that is why the Prime Minister is having such a difficult time keeping his story straight.

I will note that I am prepared to cede the floor right now if the members across the way will rise and commit that the justice committee will resume its investigation into the SNC-Lavalin scandal. The Prime Minister has shut down the justice committee investigation and has shut down the ethics committee. It is a justice committee with no justice and an ethics committee with no ethics, but we can fix all of that here and now if the Prime Minister will rise and give his word that—

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, Canadians are seized with how critical the topic is we are discussing, and it is very difficult to hear because of all the chatter on the far side of the room. I would ask you to bring the House to order, please.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay also has a point of order.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I was listening very closely to my hon. colleague, but I never heard him mention the word “budget”. Perhaps I did not hear it. I had to reach over to my good friend from Prince Edward Island to ask whether he heard the word “budget”, because he has such extensive experience. He responded that he had not heard the word “budget”. I know we are going to hear the word “budget”. That was the exchange that happened, but there was no disrespect to the member for Carleton, and I am more than interested in what he has to say.

• (1640)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before the hon. member for Carleton continues, I was going to interrupt at some point just for a short time. I have some housekeeping to do.

It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona, Canada Post Corporation; the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Veterans Affairs; and the hon. member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, Finance.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned the word “budget” at the very outset of my remarks. I realize that this is a very large chamber, with imperfect acoustics, and that the NDP sits very, very far down the way and that sometimes my voice, as delicate as it

is, does not travel that far. I also have a tendency to turn to my right when I speak, and therefore those to my left often do not hear what I am saying.

Back to the subject at hand, which is the cover-up budget, the Prime Minister has introduced \$41 billion of new cash spending, money he is splashing all over the land, far and wide, hoping he distracts Canadians from the SNC-Lavalin scandal with their own money. I have said it before but I will say it again: this is the Kathleen Wynne three steps. Step number one is a massive scandal. Step number two is massive deficit spending to cover it all up, and step number three is massive tax increases to pay for it all after the election. That is exactly what the Liberals have planned here. They are now into step two.

However, I believe that if we lay out the facts of the case about this scandal and the corruption, in addition to the outrageous tax-and-spend policies of the government, Canadians will choose differently in October, and the Liberals will not have a chance to carry out step number three. That is the case we are making here today.

I was speaking earlier about the falsehood that the Prime Minister was trying to save the headquarters of SNC-Lavalin. I had just finished disproving that claim altogether. As I was saying earlier, the company's headquarters cannot leave because of a \$1.5-billion loan agreement with the Quebec pension plan that keeps the company HQ in Montreal until 2024. As well, the company is in the process of renovating its headquarters there to accommodate its thousands of employees in a building on which it has just signed a 20-year lease. In other words, it did all of this knowing that it would be prosecuted and knowing that it was not getting a deferred prosecution agreement. The Prime Minister's threat to the former attorney general that the headquarters would leave if she did not intervene and offer a special deal was absolutely and totally false.

Furthermore, when asked before the justice committee what evidence he had for this claim that 9,000 jobs would vanish unless the SNC charges were shelved, Gerald Butts said there was nothing “specific”, no specific evidence. He sat there hour after hour and made the claim that 9,000 jobs would disappear, that he had been twisted in knots over these lost jobs, and that is why he and the Prime Minister took the extraordinary step of intervening 20 times with the former attorney general to have the charges set aside. When we asked him where he got the idea that 9,000 jobs would vanish, he said that it was nothing “specific”.

We then asked Michael Wernick, the Clerk of the Privy Council, who has his hands on every briefing note that moves around the ministry, if he had any report or document he could table with the committee showing that 9,000 jobs would vanish. He said no.

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There is no documented evidence or specific information, no proof whatsoever, that these jobs would vanish, yet the whole justification for the government's interference in this file was that these jobs were at stake. The jobs were never at stake. We found that out 10 days ago, when the CEO of the company came out and said that he never threatened 9,000 jobs or a headquarters move. We know that he cannot move the jobs out of the country, because construction jobs are done at construction sites, and construction sites cannot be moved. A construction site is where the construction is being done.

● (1645)

For example, SNC-Lavalin will be involved in the construction of a transit project that will go from right around this area out to south Ottawa. A dozen kilometres or so of track will be going out to the south end of this city and into my riding. The last time I checked, a rail system cannot be built in Beijing, carried by helicopter and dropped from the sky on the nation's capital. The work will be done here, and so will the work on the \$52 billion worth of projects the company has in this country. It has the five biggest construction projects in Canada, and those jobs have to be done here in the country. They cannot be shipped abroad. This is where they will be done. To suggest otherwise is a complete falsehood.

The final falsehood in this whole jobs fantasy is that the company will automatically lose its ability to bid on federal contracts if it is convicted. We now know that this is not true. In fact, one of the very first acts the Liberal government undertook when taking office was to extend an exemption from the bidding ban to SNC-Lavalin. The company was allowed to continue bidding on federal work even though it had been charged with fraud and bribery. On December 8, 2015, the deputy minister of public works issued that exemption, and the company has continued to bid on, and I believe has even successfully won, federal contracts since being charged. The cabinet is now reviewing the bidding ban policy and likely has it in its power to ensure that SNC gets an exemption from a bidding ban even if convicted.

The reason I am getting into the technicality of this is that we keep being told that the reason the company needs to avoid going to trial is that it needs to be able to bid on federal contracts and that if it is convicted, it will lose that ability. However, we know that is not true.

If it is not about protecting the company's ability to bid on federal work, not about keeping the headquarters here and not about job losses, what is behind this incessant desire to protect this corporation from criminal prosecution? It is astounding the lengths to which the Prime Minister has gone in this matter.

There are high-profile trials every day in every country. In all my time here, going back to 2004, I have never seen a prime minister become personally involved in any of them. It is just not done. If people walked into any of our constituency offices and said they were charged with a crime and wanted our political assistance to get out of the charges, we would politely show them the door. We would say that we are sorry but that they have come to the wrong office and need to see a lawyer to defend their case in court before a judge, and perhaps a jury, but we cannot help them. Why? It is because we do not adjudicate criminal trials in a political setting. We have courts for that.

The fact that the Prime Minister became embroiled in this particular criminal trial, the fact that he went to such lengths to execute a campaign of pressure on his former attorney general to set aside criminal charges, is spectacularly unusual. I would defy any member of this House to give me another example of a prime minister getting involved in a criminal trial at all, let alone to this degree.

I am not speaking rhetorically. I am literally asking members of the House of Commons to feel free to shout it out. Give me an example. Name a trial, just one. There is dead silence. No one here can point to a single example of a prime minister or any politician getting involved to set aside criminal charges on anyone. It is a spectacular and bizarre act by a prime minister in this country.

● (1650)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member opposite was challenging members to cite a prime minister. I would reflect on Brian Mulroney and Kim Campbell. Maybe he could explain why former prime minister Brian Mulroney mandated and instructed an attorney general to do something.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Carleton can continue.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I have been waiting all day to ask questions of the member for Carleton, but he continues to speak.

I feel it is very unfair of the Liberals to use a point of order as an attempt to introduce a question in the House. I think it is throwing off the member for Carleton. If someone should be asking him a question, I would prefer it be me, but I have enormous respect for this chamber.

I would ask you, Mr. Speaker, to suggest that people wait until they have the opportunity to ask questions, and let the member finish his discourse.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I will remind hon. members how the procedures work. As the hon. member does have time remaining, he will continue. When he is done, he will have 10 minutes for questions and comments.

I will let the hon. member for Carleton continue.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I did ask members of the House of Commons to give a single example of any prime minister who has interfered in a criminal prosecution.

The member across the way got up in a failed point of order. Not only did he fail procedurally, but he failed factually. He tried to point to Brian Mulroney, but Brian Mulroney never once interfered in the criminal prosecution of anyone, any person or any company. There is no analogy to be drawn between this and that. In fact, he mentioned David Milgaard. David Milgaard was prosecuted years before former prime minister Mulroney ever took office. It would be impossible to draw that same kind of linkage.

There is no prime minister, at least in my lifetime, who has ever interfered in a criminal prosecution, ever. It is just not done. I say that to illustrate the gravity of this scandal.

The Budget

As I was saying earlier, what distinguishes Canada from other places in the world is that we have liberty under the law. There is nothing unique or different about the air we breathe, the water we drink or the ground we stand on, other than that we have liberty under the law, and so many places in the world do not. They live in lawless places, where it is not the rule of law; it is the law of rulers. In other words, there are arbitrary decisions by political leaders to decide who goes to jail and who does not.

If we normalize the process of a prime minister picking up the phone or going in person to top law officers and telling them who will be prosecuted and who will not, then we could slide down the slippery slope to those other places. Those are places around the world from which people flee to come here, precisely because we have the rule of law. I am very blessed to represent many newcomers to Canada in my constituency. They are particularly affronted by the political interference, because they left places specifically because they wanted to get away from political leaders using their muscle to get a legal outcome for friends or foes.

If the Prime Minister of Canada believes he can do that with impunity, and if the Canadian people let him get away with it, then we are heading down a very dark and ugly path indeed.

However, it does not have to be that way. Here is the remedy I propose. Let us take the entire list of the players who interfered in this criminal trial and invite them to come to the justice committee. Let us swear them in under oath and have them testify. Let members of all parties pose questions to them and get answers on the record. Then, let us write a full report, issuing our findings to all Canadians. Let us do all of that before the next election, so that Canadians can judge what happened here and decide if they are willing to allow the people who did it to continue to govern.

Members will notice that, in everything I just stated, I have been utterly neutral about the possible outcome of that justice committee investigation. I am leaving open the possibility that the Prime Minister could come before the committee and give brilliant testimony to explain away all of the contradictions that I have highlighted and all of the facts that the former attorney general has put before the world. He could do that, if he is telling the truth. If he has nothing to hide, he will do that. In fact, that really is the core of this discussion.

Liberals came here and voted for 30 hours rather than let us recommence the committee investigation into this scandal. Why? Now they are requiring that I stay on my feet and speak for hour upon hour upon hour. Why?

●(1655)

The Liberals are refusing again and again opportunities to have the committee continue and complete its investigation. Why?

If members across the way and the Liberal Prime Minister have nothing to hide, why not just let the committee complete its investigation? It would be a very easy thing to do. We could add extra hours to the committee's schedule to make sure that it does not interrupt one minute of the committee's normal work plan, and we could find out exactly what went on. It would be a very easy thing to do, if there is nothing to hide.

Then again, if there is something to cover up, then the justice committee is shut down, and a week and a half later the ethics committee is shut down. Then attacks are made on the character of the former attorney general and the former Treasury Board president, who also spoke out, and they are both threatened with being kicked out of caucus altogether for blowing the whistle. That is what one does if one has something to hide. That is why we are calling this a cover-up.

Here, in the House of Commons, we have the ability to uncover the truth. That is the principal purpose of my intervention here today.

It was interesting when the Liberals stayed here and kept us here for 30 hours straight, voting on item after item after item of expenditure because they refused to allow a committee investigation to proceed. They set up cots in the back, behind the curtains there, so they could sneak out and have a nap. I do not hold them—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Malpeque.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I know the member for Carleton is talking about a lot of fiction today. It was not the Liberals who kept us here. It was the Conservatives who kept us here, whereby they voted against every good program that was in the last budget.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, it was actually the estimates we were voting on, which is different from the budget. However, the member is just the finance committee chair and does not need to know the difference between the two, I guess.

We just got a budget from the other side of the House of Commons that contained in it over 150 million dollars' worth of math mistakes. The finance minister sent his officials out to say they were all typos. We very quickly pulled out calculators and figured out that they were not typos; they were in fact math errors. Once again, he is just the finance minister; he does not need to be good at math, I guess. The finance committee chair does not need to know the difference between budget and estimates, and the finance minister does not need to know how to do arithmetic in the current government.

The member has now distracted me from my train of thought, which was related to the evening of votes that the government forced upon the House of Commons. We were voting on billions of dollars of spending approvals. The Conservatives said that if we agreed to do a justice committee investigation to get to the bottom of the SNC-Lavalin corruption scandal, we could bundle all the votes and go home. The government said it was not going to allow an investigation. Therefore, the Conservative opposition was required, as part of its duty, to keep the government here, voting on one spending item after another.

In order to get through that 30 hours, the government set up taxpayer-funded cots just behind the curtain over there. For the viewers out there, there were these cots where members could go and have a snooze between votes. Of course, there were blankets. What are blankets for? They are to help one cover up. Then, because they were so ornery and angry, they came in here occasionally and blamed us because they could not get a night's sleep.

The Budget

My advice to them is this. The secret to a good night's sleep is a clear conscience. If they want a good night's sleep, they should have a clear conscience. If they want a clear conscience, they should tell the truth, let it all out and unburden themselves of all these falsehoods, because falsehoods are heavy things to carry around. That is why the Prime Minister has looked so heavy lately. He is carrying a lot of falsehoods around. They are like lead weights everywhere he goes, and they are weighing on him. If he would just stop the cover-up and end those falsehoods, he could move forward.

It is possible that the truth he is covering up is so appalling that he could not be re-elected. However, I would submit to him that any electoral strategy that hinges on keeping ugly truths hidden is destined to fail. He is not going to be able to keep this all under wraps until after the election. He has people in his own midst who are accusing him of a cover-up. His former Treasury Board president, the person to whom he wisely entrusted the management of our entire public service and the approval of tens of billions of dollars of expenditure, has said that there is a lot more to this story that has not been told, and that he is trying to shut down the debate on it.

That is what the Liberals say about the Prime Minister. Therefore, he cannot simply dismiss these allegations as something coming from a politically motivated opposition. The two women who have resigned from his cabinet have gained absolutely nothing by doing so. Not that this would matter to them, but I think it is worth stating the obvious. They have taken major pay cuts. They have had their position reduced from minister to non-minister, which is a very big distinction in a parliamentary system where ministers are responsible for the executive governance of the country. None of that was to their benefit.

• (1700)

We have heard a lot of people trying to attack the character of these two women, saying that they were being opportunistic by exposing this scandal, but I fail to see what they have gained. What advantage has it conferred to them politically by telling these truths? There is none. They have made immense personal sacrifices for blowing the whistle. One, they are no longer ministers even though they are far more qualified than those who remain on the front bench; two, they have come under attack, vicious, personal, sexist and racist attacks, by senior Liberals; and three, they have faced threats.

As recently as yesterday, the employment minister called the former attorney general unethical and now the Liberal Party is threatening to throw them out of caucus altogether. To suggest that these two former ministers were doing this to somehow advance their own political interests runs exactly counter to what happened. It is very clear.

Though I obviously do not share the politics of either of them, I do clearly respect the conviction and principles that they have shown and their willingness to sacrifice their own careers in order to stand up for the truth. Both of these women have more integrity in their pinky fingers than the Prime Minister does from head to toe.

If he disagrees with me on that, then he should do what they have been willing to do. The former attorney general went before the justice committee to testify, took a barrage of questions from the

Liberal delegation and submitted 40 pages of written text messages and an audio recording, all of which confirm that she told the truth.

What is interesting about all of these people who are trying to discredit the former attorney general is that they cannot point to a single falsehood she has told. Even though she has tabled something like 40 pages of text messages and an audio recording and even though the government has an army of spin doctors, dirt diggers and researchers to find any little hair that is out of place, the Prime Minister's team has not been able to find a single contradiction or falsehood in anything the former attorney general has said so far.

In fact, she is the one person at the heart of this whole controversy whose story has not once changed in any way, shape or form. She has consistently told the same story over and over again. When challenged, she provided text messages to support her claims and when challenged again, she provided audio recordings. All of that evidence precisely supports the claims that she made all along.

I am not a trial lawyer, but I know that one thing judges and juries look for when they are determining who to believe is whose story is changing. If one witness's story seems to change more often than he changes his colourful socks and the other witness has a single story that is set in stone and does not change, the wise judge or jury will believe the latter over the former. That is why we, as Conservatives, having examined the evidence, have concluded that the former attorney general has told the truth and that the Prime Minister has not.

That being said, we are so confident in our view of that, we welcome the Prime Minister proving us wrong. He should come to committee, testify under oath, put his hand on the Good Book, tell his story and answer questions, but so far, he has been unwilling to do that. It is like he is terrified that we might get too close to the truth, that we might find out the real reason he went to such lengths to protect this accused corporate criminal.

• (1705)

We might find out that he stated a patent falsehood to Canadians when he claimed that the former attorney general never raised any concerns about his interference in the matter. We might find other falsehoods or expose bigger contradictions. His answer again and again is to shut it all down. He shut down the justice committee and the ethics committee. Tomorrow morning he will have a chance to change course.

The justice committee will meet again now that we have new written evidence and recorded conversations that blow apart earlier claims by the Prime Minister and his team of witnesses. Conservatives will move to reopen the investigation and include all of the witnesses, all of the players who are at the heart of this scandal and who are alleged to have interfered with the work of the former attorney general by pushing her to sign a special deal for SNC-Lavalin to avoid criminal trial.

The Budget

I want to examine the merits of the former attorney general's original decision not to interfere. The Prime Minister chose to amend the Criminal Code through an omnibus bill in the budget, through which he created something called deferred prosecution agreements. The agreements, for those who are not familiar, provide that corporations facing criminal charges can avoid trial by fessing up, apologizing, paying a fine and promising not to do it again. Factors that a director of public prosecutions must consider to determine the eligibility of a company for a deferred prosecution include severity of the offence and whether or not the company self-reported its crimes. Let us review both of those issues.

Let us start with whether the company self-reported. It turns out the company did not. Instead, the company was caught when one of its senior employees was charged and ultimately convicted in Switzerland. I am going to read some excerpts from the Financial Post:

According to police, Ben Aissa [a former senior employee at SNC-Lavalin] established a scheme in which two companies, Duvel Securities and Dinova International, billed SNC roughly \$127 million for helping the firm win dozens of major contracts in Libya during the 2000s. In fact, Swiss and Canadian police say, Duvel and Dinova were shell companies controlled by Ben Aissa. The money—including US\$1.5 million spent on a yacht for Saadi Gaddafi—was used to bribe Libyan officials and pad the bank accounts of Ben Aissa and Mr. Bebawi, who left SNC in 2006.

I now quote Global News:

In Switzerland, an ex-senior employee from SNC-Lavalin pleaded guilty to fraud, corruption and money laundering in relation to his business in Libya in 2014—before the RCMP charges. Riadh Ben Aissa acknowledged in court that he bribed Saadi Gadhafi, son of Libya's late dictator Moammar Gadhafi, so SNC could win contracts.

It was out of these charges in Switzerland that the RCMP was able to ascertain the conduct of SNC-Lavalin and, therefore, was able to bring forward allegations of fraud and bribery. In other words, it was not that the company realized somebody did something wrong and then called the police and said it had made a mistake and wanted to self-report, and to please hold them accountable. The RCMP had to find out through Swiss proceedings that this corruption had occurred in order to launch its own investigation and lay its own charges.

• (1710)

The first criteria for getting a DPA, a deferred prosecution agreement, is not met.

The next is the severity. Was the offence severe and broad or was it a minor offence that could, therefore, better be treated through an administrative penalty rather than through a criminal court trial? Let us examine the charges that the company faces and determine if we think they are severe enough to warrant prosecution.

Let me read again from Global News:

In 2015, the RCMP charged SNC-Lavalin, along with its international division, with corruption and fraud in relation with their business dealings in Libya.

The RCMP said officials at the company attempted to bribe several public officials in the country, including dictator Moammar Gadhafi, as well as other businesses in Libya.

RCMP officials said SNC-Lavalin also lied to Libyan companies to defraud them of nearly \$130 million.

Now the Financial Post:

SNC and its subsidiaries SNC-Lavalin Construction Inc. and SNC-Lavalin International Inc. are also alleged to have defrauded various Libyan public agencies of approximately \$129.8 million.

Let me stop on that point.

This has been said again and again. We hear it muttered under the breath of some Liberals that what SNC did over in Libya is just the way that business is done over there. Frankly, I find that kind of utterance despicable. It is despicable to think it is okay for wealthy western companies to go into poor, developing nations where people live in squalor and rob them of \$130 million just because that is the way things are done over there or that is how we have to behave, so goes the story, to be competitive in different parts of the world.

These places are so poor precisely because businesses have thought it appropriate to conduct themselves in that way. The parasitical corruption that has afflicted many countries in the world is the reason so many people still live in grinding poverty. Going to these poor countries, it is astonishing to see how hard people work. On their streets people are always working. One can ask, "How is it possible that these people work so hard and yet they are so poor?" The answer is, in part, corruption because the labour of the people who are toiling away before our eyes is squandered by a corrupt and entitled elite who just suck the country of all of its wealth. That parasitical conduct is not limited to people from those countries. In fact, often it is foreign interests that come in and take advantage of the opportunity to defraud.

We have signed on to international conventions against fraud and bribery precisely because foreign companies have gotten into the practice of going in, defrauding companies and then getting the heck out because they know they could never be prosecuted back home. They go home. They leave with all the cash that they stashed in their pockets, having plundered the people, with no intention of ever going back. They know that they will never be prosecuted in the country where they carried out their misdeeds. That is why we have signed on to international conventions so that we can join with other countries in prosecuting corrupt corporate enterprises that rob people.

We, as a nation, understand that it is not only a miserable way to make money but it is an illegal way to make money, by robbing the poor. It is our duty, our moral duty, to prosecute this kind of corruption when it happens, even though it happens beyond our borders and even though we might not be the direct victims of the corruption.

• (1715)

Therefore, no, it is not a small offence. It was not just that the SNC lobbyists and insiders bribed the Gadhafis with prostitutes and yachts, as unseemly as that sounds. It is also that they are alleged to have robbed the people of that country of \$130 million. That is a lot of money, especially for a country that is suffering in poverty. A lot of good could have been done for the Libyan people if they had been able to keep their own money, had they not been defrauded by these alleged crimes. Therefore, no, it was not a frivolous offence for which the appropriate sentence is an administrative penalty. It is a serious crime to defraud people, and it should be treated as such by our legal system.

Knowing all of this, it is astonishing that the Prime Minister would consider it such a top priority to help this Liberal-linked company avoid prosecution.

The Budget

We have addressed the two first criteria upon which a deferred prosecution is supposed to be judged by the prosecutor, and ultimately, by the attorney general. On those two criteria, it is clear as day that the company did not qualify.

Finally, there is a third criterion I forgot to mention, which is whether this was an isolated incident. We all understand that in our judicial system, we have a principle of proportionality. If someone makes a single mistake, the judge will take that into consideration when issuing a verdict. The prosecutor, the Crown, might even take it into account when deciding whether to pursue a trial or accept a moderate plea bargain. In this case, was it was an isolated incident? Were there just a few bad apples in Libya who made some mistakes who were not part of a broader corporate corruption culture in the company? The answer, of course, is no.

I will read some of the history this company has been involved in. I will read from Global News again:

three top executives were also charged with bribery in relation to the McGill University Health Centre. Former CEO Pierre Duhaime, along with McGill officials, pleaded guilty in the case.

This was the CEO and not some bad apple who, off in a faraway land, did some things unknown to anyone else. He was the CEO, and it was in relation to a contract with the McGill University Health Centre.

Then we have the Jacques Cartier Bridge. As reported by Global News:

Quebec prosecutors are working with the RCMP on the possibility of new criminal charges against SNC-Lavalin tied to a contract to refurbish Montreal's Jacques Cartier Bridge, court documents show.

Again, from Global News:

In court documents, the RCMP lays out a bribery scheme involving a \$127-million Jacques Cartier Bridge contract in the early 2000s. Former federal official Michel Fournier pleaded guilty in 2017 to accepting more than \$2.3 million in payments from SNC-Lavalin in connection with the project.

This is an astonishing crime. It is a massive project of \$127 million, and a federal official was paid \$2.3 million in a bribe to get that contract. This is right here on our own home turf, which reminds us that the cost of corporate corruption for this company is not limited to some faraway land. It is right here in our own country.

I will go on reading from Global News, which said:

In 2011, an SNC employee whose job was to facilitate travel of SNC employees in and out of Libya was arrested in Mexico and accused of attempting to smuggle Gadhafi's son and family out of the country. The employee was eventually released from jail and not charged in Canada.

What is a Canadian construction company doing helping to smuggle the Gadhafis in Mexico? We go from Montreal to Libya to Mexico. Everywhere, this company seems to be involved in the most appalling and in some cases downright bizarre forms of corruption.

• (1720)

The company was also banned from bidding on projects by the World Bank for 10 years over alleged misconduct during a bridge construction contract in Panama. Now we have Panama. It is Libya, Montreal, Mexico and Panama. SNC is in legal trouble in all these places because of the conduct in which it engages.

Then we find in an article, again by Global News:

During an investigation from CBC and the Globe and Mail, it was alleged there was an internal accounting code for bribes.

This is just an example of how entrenched the corruption had become. They actually had a system of codes they could use to properly account for all the bribery they were doling out.

On the third criterion to determine whether the company was entitled to a deferred prosecution agreement, which is whether the offence was an isolated incident, clearly it was in Montreal, in Libya, in Mexico and in Panama. It was right at the top, with the CEO of the entire company.

It seems everywhere one turns, someone from SNC-Lavalin is being accused or charged or convicted or pleading guilty to high-level, serious corruption involving hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars. No, this was not simply an isolated incident.

We have a couple of sponsorship-scandal-era Liberals heckling away on the other side about ethics. I am glad that we have some of those sponsorship Liberals across the way, because it really is full circle for this particular scandal.

How did we find out about this scandal? We learned about it because of a law Stephen Harper put in place in response to the sponsorship scandal, the Federal Accountability Act. The Liberal Party, according to Justice Gomery, had engaged in an elaborate kickback scheme funnelling \$40 million of cash, much of it still missing and never recovered, and some of it going right into the coffers of the Liberal Party itself. Paul Martin admitted that the Liberal Party stole at least \$1 million. He gave the money back after he was caught.

We were struck by the fact that all kinds of people were charged for this fraud, but not the Liberal Party. It occurred to us that the possible reason for that was that the attorney general at the time was a Liberal, and the attorney general's office was responsible for prosecuting federal offences.

We wanted to make sure that never again could people get off a criminal prosecution because a friend or the party was in control of the office of the Attorney General. We created the director of public prosecutions, a separate and independent office, whereby a top, respected prosecutor would have his or her own office and could operate with total independence from the political arm of the government. So independent did we create this office that for the Attorney General to give any direction to the director of public prosecutions, it would have to be in writing, and that written instruction would have to be reported publicly in something called the *Canada Gazette*. That is a publication the government puts out to inform the public of decisions that have been made. In other words, there is no pulling someone into the office and twisting his or her arm. It has to be in writing, and it has to be made public. This, of course, is very inconvenient for those trying to interfere in a prosecution. It makes it a little difficult to keep it all under wraps.

The Budget

Here is where it gets really interesting. Gerald Butts, according to text messages and sworn testimony by the former attorney general, told two different people that he did not want to respect that law, because it was a Harper law. He thought, “Harper put it in; therefore, we do not have to respect it.” He told that to staff members in the attorney general's office, and he told it to the former attorney general herself.

In the 40-page package she tabled with the justice committee on Friday, we have documented evidence that Gerald Butts did exactly that. If he is listening, I hope he is bowing his head in shame for saying that they do not have to follow the law, just because that law was put in place by a different political party under a different government.

● (1725)

That law was designed to protect the independence of our judicial and prosecutorial system. It is not to be trod upon just because of a partisan desire to get things done by going around the rules. That is how we got here in the first place. We had a prime minister in Stephen Harper who was determined to root out corruption and to protect the independence of prosecutions. He passed a law, the Federal Accountability Act, to make sure that he put an end to corruption in the prosecution of crime, and it worked really well.

I see that my Liberal friends across the way have gone silent since we have reminded them of that. I think that is probably a wise decision for them indeed.

An hon. member: Did you explain Arthur Porter, or are you getting around to that? What happened to Arthur Porter?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Unfortunately, it was not a long silence. That being said, an empty wagon rattles the loudest, Mr. Speaker.

The reality is that nothing has changed for the old entitlement Liberals. This is a party that seems to have an impossible time shedding itself of its core identity, which is one of entitlement, stuffing its pockets with other people's money, helping its friends and breaking the law. That is what it did under the sponsorship Liberals, and that is exactly what it is doing now.

I should mention, as I was remiss earlier, and I thank the members across the way for reminding me, that SNC-Lavalin gave about \$100,000 of illegal donations to the Liberal Party, money it funnelled through the creation of phoney invoices, expenses and bonuses. Can members imagine the amount of coordination that must have been involved when the executives at that company told employees it wanted them to make phoney expense claims so it could reimburse them to give that phoney reimbursement in the form of a donation to the Liberal Party? For reasons unknown to me, when this fraud came to light, the Commissioner of Canada Elections decided to let the company and the Liberal Party off with respect to a trial or charges. The company was simply given a slap on the wrist through a compliance agreement, whereby the money was returned and the company promised never to do it again. Once again, the company was able to avoid accountability for a serious breach of law, which is very unfortunate indeed.

That being said, that does not mean that accountability is over. As it stands now, the company will face trial. As it stands now, it will face prosecution for fraud and bribery. I keep saying, “as it stands

now”, because we do not know if the new Attorney General is going to make the decision to interfere in the criminal prosecution the way the former attorney general refused to do. We know he has an open mind to the idea, but he has not made a decision. That in itself is interesting, because it shows that the cabinet shuffle of the former attorney general out and the new Attorney General in had a material impact on the prospect of prosecution for the company. As of September 2018, it was the official position of the then attorney general that the company would be prosecuted. That is no longer the case. Now it is the official position of the Attorney General that the company might be prosecuted. In other words, he has left open the possibility of taking over the prosecution himself in order to negotiate a deferred prosecution agreement or of writing a directive to the director of public prosecutions ordering that she do so on behalf of the government.

● (1730)

It would be extremely telling if, after all of this, the Prime Minister were to get his way and have the company get off. I suspect that is exactly what he plans, that he is hoping and praying that he can put this scandal under the rug until the election is over, and then in the first couple of weeks, out will come the special deal. The Liberals will do it early in the term to make sure that everyone has forgotten by the subsequent election. Remember December 8, 2015, and one of the very first acts of the current government was to give SNC-Lavalin an exemption on a federal bidding ban that it had faced due to the fraud and bribery charges it is contesting right now. On December 8, there was a special deal for SNC-Lavalin within weeks of this Prime Minister taking office.

We know it is always a priority for Liberals to help this company whenever they can. Do not be surprised. If this Prime Minister gets back in office, it will not be two months. This trial will be over. This company will have a special deal. A small monetary fine will be paid. The CEO will cry crocodile tears and promise never do it again, and on we will go.

The message will have gone out that if individuals are charged with a serious crime in Canada, their recourse is not to go to court and defend themselves with a lawyer in front of a jury and a judge; their recourse is to hire an army of lobbyists and swarm the Prime Minister's Office to convince him to come to their rescue. If they have enough influence and enough political power, they might just get their way. Of course, that is a violation of the basic principle that everyone is equal before the law.

That is why Canadians have reacted so forcefully to this scandal. The Prime Minister assumed that no one would be interested. There were a lot of details and facts to keep track of. How can anyone follow all of these different debates about deferred prosecution agreements and directors of public prosecutions and attorneys general and on and on? The reason is that, at its core, this scandal is really simple. It comes down to this: Do we have one system of justice or two? Is it one set of rules for the people and another for the powerful? Do we have the rule of law or the law of rulers? People understand that because we have a proud, enduring history that goes back hundreds of years, which says no one is above the law, that not even the king or the queen are above the law in our system. Because of that principle, we all live in one of the most prosperous places in the world.

The Budget

We see this everywhere. If we go around the world, we will see the difference between those countries that have a good, well-functioning legal system that is supreme over all of their rulers. Compare the quality of life, for example, in Hong Kong to the quality of life in other Asian countries. Hong Kong has a British legal system respected around the world, at least for now, and God willing, we hope it will continue in the future. People who have commercial interests from around the world will go to Hong Kong to litigate their differences, because the system there is so successful in mimicking British common law. It is inherited from generations of British people who brought that system to that jurisdiction before the reunification. Looking at the quality of life in Hong Kong, people there have a GDP per capita that is almost the same as Canada, even though it is what I would call a “city state”. It is on a piece of land that is a seventh of the size of the city of Ottawa and has eight times the population. They have to import their own water; they have no natural resources. However, it is an extremely prosperous place. Why? It is because they have the rule of law and, I might add, free enterprise.

● (1735)

Those basic ingredients make for an incredibly prosperous outcome for any place anywhere in the world, regardless of culture, race, history or background. If one has the ingredients of rule of law, free enterprise and democracy, one's people are almost destined to flourish. Once the rule of law starts to be corrupted, everything else comes tumbling down.

The Liberals are scratching their heads on the other side to try to figure out why Canadians are so angry about the SNC scandal. It is because Canadians know that all of our good fortune rests on the rule of law. We never want to normalize the idea that a politician, particularly the head of government, could pick up the phone and start twisting arms and threatening people's jobs in order to get a prosecution dropped.

An hon. member: Lifestyles of the rich and famous.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Yes, “lifestyles of the rich and famous”, as someone yelled out. It is true. This is a Prime Minister whose lawlessness has centred mostly around money. When he was found guilty of violating the ethics act four different ways by the Ethic Commissioner, which was the first time that any prime minister had ever faced such a conviction, it was about money. Someone came to him and said that they were looking for a \$15 million grant, asked him if he would like to have a free \$200,000 vacation on his island, and the Prime Minister said it was a deal and off he went. The Prime Minister said that he was getting tired of all this politicking and needed some frolicking, and away he went down to paradise island.

A lot of people have a hard time appreciating the commercial value of a vacation like that. We looked it up, and it costs about a quarter of a million dollars to rent this island, or a similar one, for a couple of weeks. The Prime Minister stayed there for free, so we can infer that the in-kind value of the gift was about a quarter of a million dollars.

I want members to think about this for a second. If a junior procurement officer had taken a free weekend at someone's cottage and then given that someone a contract, he would be out on his ear the same day. He might be charged for taking a bribe. When the head

of the government literally meets with someone who is asking for a \$15 million grant and accepts a quarter of a million dollar gift from that someone, he gets off with an Ethics Commissioner report and a slap on the wrist.

The Prime Minister thought he was indestructible and could get away with anything. There are clear sections in the Criminal Code that make it an offence for someone to accept a benefit from a person with whom they have government business. The Prime Minister clearly and flagrantly violated those sections. For reasons unknown to us, the RCMP did not investigate that offence.

I think he thought that because he is the son of a former prime minister, has a multi-million dollar trust fund, is rich, vacations at billionaire islands, surfs in Tofino and does whatever he wants, that if he decides a company should not be prosecuted, then that is that. The case should be thrown out, a deal signed and it should be taken out of the way. By the way, if the Attorney General is causing heck, then she should be taken out of the way too. That is how he thinks. We have all witnessed it.

We also witnessed when the Prime Minister was angry that a vote was not happening fast enough. He stormed over and grabbed the arm of the Conservative whip, tugged him and elbowed people along his way. We have seen how he erupts in rage when he does not get his way. This is the conduct of someone who has always had his way. We all know the classic spoiled rich kid who gets everything he wants all the time, when he wants, and no one had better get in his way. After all, do we know who his dad is?

● (1740)

When the Prime Minister decided that his friends at SNC-Lavalin should not face prosecution, he just wanted it done. We know that that was his state of mind, because the clerk of the Privy Council said so in a recorded audiotape. He said the Prime Minister was in a mood, and “he's going to find a way to get it done, one way or another.”

The clerk said to the former attorney general in that famous conversation that he feared she was on a collision with the Prime Minister. He used the term “collision”. Of course, she knew exactly what that meant. She made reference to the “Saturday night massacre”, when Richard Nixon famously fired personnel to cover up Watergate. She said that she was just waiting for “the other shoe to drop.”

A month later, she was out of the position. It was just a coincidence, a total coincidence. What was the story for that sudden firing, removing a highly competent, accomplished and respected attorney general? Well, it was this strange game of musical chairs that resulted from Scott Brison resigning. The Treasury Board president resigned, which meant that the attorney general had to be moved, even though she was not replacing him.

The Budget

Then, weeks later, we found out that was not the Prime Minister's official line any more. The reason, we learned, was that she was moved, according to media reports by some Liberal supporters in the press, because she wanted to appoint a chief justice who was not Liberal enough. Apparently, according to this report, the Prime Minister thought she had bad judgment because she wanted to elevate a respected chief justice of Manitoba to the head of the Supreme Court of Canada, even though he was not a devoted Liberal, a Liberal ideologue. That is the new explanation for her removal as Attorney General.

Putting aside the fact that leaking discussions about Supreme Court nominations violates the basic apolitical principle and confidentiality of that nomination process, consider how radically the Prime Minister's story has changed from when he was claiming it was only about satisfying the game of musical chairs that Scott Brison's departure caused the government.

The story keeps changing, except for one story, and that story, of course, is the one we have heard from the former attorney general herself, the one now validated by three and a half dozen pages of documented evidence submitted to the justice committee, published for all eyes to see. Even if there were any doubts left at all, those doubts went up in smoke when we heard that famous audio recording, which demonstrated that what happened was exactly what she said had happened.

Liberals have attacked her for recording that conversation. They have said that they think it was very unprofessional. They fail to take into consideration the context wherein she had been the victim of hounding, veiled threats, inappropriate pressure, and a whole other assortment of inappropriate conduct by the Prime Minister and his team in order to get her to shelve the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin.

She knew that if she did not have evidence, then the good old boys around the Prime Minister would lie and deny, lie and deny. The problem with lying and denying when dealing with someone like this particular former attorney general is that she is highly scrupulous, and she is punctilious in her maintenance of records.

Unfortunately for the Prime Minister, he and his team have no evidence of their own to contradict what she has said.

• (1745)

Instead, the Liberals have used more bully tactics, gutless unnamed sources spreading rumours, racist and sexist comments by former Liberal cabinet ministers in the press targeting the former attorney general, anything they can do to discredit her the Prime Minister has directed them to do. The bad news for him is that it has not worked. Canadians have seen through all of it. They knew exactly what he was trying to do and they have thoroughly rejected it. They see right through the nasty personal attacks as the act of a desperate man clinging to his job and held up only by his personal ego.

In the long run, the Prime Minister has an opportunity. That opportunity is to finally tell the truth. The truth will set him free. He need not be burdened any longer by falsehoods and secrets. He could release himself from all of that by coming clean and admitting that he inappropriately interfered in a criminal prosecution to help a

Liberal-linked firm get released from having a trial, that he bullied his former attorney general and when she would not back down, he moved her out. If he did that, he would suffer some political damage, but it would probably be less damaging than what he is doing right now. It would probably earn him a little empathy from people who would say that at least now he is telling the truth. He has put us all through a nightmare for the last two months, he has attempted to corrupt our legal system with political interference, but at least now he is telling the truth.

With that, he can begin to heal and this wound that he has caused our justice system can also begin to heal. However, as long as he holds onto the falsehoods, as long as he tries to cover up the truth, it gets worse and worse. We will daily, through the tools of Parliament, extract from him the truth, like a rotten tooth, one piece at a time. It is coming out. I do not know if the Prime Minister has noticed, but his cover-up has so far not gone very well.

Ms. Stephanie Kusie: The former attorney general, the former president of the Treasury Board, the member for Whitby.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: That is a good point. I am getting some helpful comments from the wise member for Calgary Midnapore. I mean that sincerely. She has just pointed something out that I forgot to mention.

We have had a resignation of the member for Whitby, a resignation of the Treasury Board president, a resignation of the former attorney general, a resignation of the principal secretary and a resignation of the head of the entire public service, Michael Wernick. Therefore, everybody is resigning but no one did anything wrong. Absolutely nobody did anything wrong. They are just resigning for nothing. If the Prime Minister thinks that this is working, he needs to sit down and scribble out that list of resignations to find out the contrary.

We can go through each one. Let us start with the former attorney general. We know why she resigned. She says that she resigned because the Prime Minister said that her continued presence in the cabinet spoke for itself, an attempt to extract a phony endorsement by her of his SNC-Lavalin conduct. She says in a letter she recently released that having heard that comment by the Prime Minister, she decided to resign and that her resignation would speak for itself. In other words, she thought his conduct so appalling in this affair that she was unable to sit in cabinet at all with him as the Prime Minister of that cabinet.

• (1750)

Then we have the former Treasury Board president. She resigned because she said that somebody, and I think she meant the Prime Minister, was trying to shut down this whole matter and prevent the truth from coming out. She said that there is a lot more to this story that has not yet been told, and the Prime Minister is preventing anyone from telling it, so she resigned.

The Budget

People do not just resign from cabinet for nothing. Being a minister of the federal government is literally a one-in-a-million opportunity. We have about 37 million Canadians and we have about 37 ministers. Therefore, literally, roughly one in a million Canadians is a federal minister. That is how rare and precious an opportunity it is to serve around the cabinet table. People who work their whole lives building up a body of expertise that makes them respected enough to sit at that council of ministers do not just storm off in a huff over an interpersonal spat or because they are friends with someone else who is in a different clique.

That is certainly not the conduct that a doctor or a top renowned lawyer, both of whom are extremely respected, would ever engage in. Both of them would have known and did know the immense privilege it was for them to serve at the cabinet table, and serve with distinction they did. However, they were prepared to give it all up, because the Prime Minister's personal conduct was so egregious they could not bear the thought of sitting at the same table over which he was the chairman.

Then we move down the list of the additional resignations. Gerald Butts has been called the PMO's puppet master. He was the principal secretary of the Prime Minister of Canada. He is personally the best friend of the Prime Minister. Working in the PMO was his dream job. He devoted his entire life to that enterprise. He would not have resigned had his conduct not been extremely serious, but resign he did.

Then we have the Clerk of the Privy Council. This is the head of probably the largest employer in the entire country. Hundreds of thousands of people work as public servants, indirectly reporting up through the chain to the Clerk of the Privy Council. Mr. Wernick devoted his life to the public service, and it would have been his life's work to get up to that position. He would not surrender that opportunity unless this matter was extremely serious.

There we have it, four high-profile resignations, and a fifth if we include the member for Whitby who, at the early stages, linked her departure to this controversy as well.

All of that has happened in the window of two months, but the Prime Minister expects us to believe, having witnessed this spectacular meltdown, that nothing happened. It is just a big misunderstanding and a failure to communicate. If they had all just got together for a cup of coffee once in a while, then none of this would have occurred. It strains believability that all of this is the result of a simple miscommunication.

We on this side of the House have carefully and scrupulously examined the evidence and come to the conclusion that these principled former ministers stepped aside not out of some interpersonal dispute. It is clear they had nothing to gain and much to lose from doing so. They stepped aside because they could not countenance the Prime Minister's attempt to corrupt our criminal justice system. Therefore, the answer is to get to the truth, hold hearings and bring the witnesses. If the Prime Minister has nothing to hide, he will happily agree and he will show up with bells on to offer his very own testimony.

• (1755)

If, on the other hand, he is harbouring more secrets, then he will do as he has done the last two months, which is to try to continue to sweep it under the rug. He has now shut down two investigations: the justice committee's and then the ethics committee's. Does he really believe that Canadians sitting at home watching that spectacle on their televisions believe he has nothing to hide when he does that?

In just over 12 hours, the justice committee will reconvene. That gives the Prime Minister some time to reflect on how he has handled this scandal and whether he thinks he can go on and on trying to silence his critics and cover up the truth. What I would recommend he do is to meet with his committee members before the justice committee gathers tomorrow and tell them that the cover-up is over, that he is no longer going to ask them to go in there and humiliate themselves and disgrace their constituents by voting against accountability, that instead he is just going to ask them to go in and open the investigation and then he will instruct his staff in his inner circle to follow him into that committee room and one by one confess what happened, submit themselves to vigorous questioning and allow the committee to issue a final report.

Even if all that happens, the majority on the committee is still Liberal. That means that the Liberals will have the final pen on the report that the committee writes. We are asking him merely to submit to an investigation by a body on which the Liberals have a majority, so his claims that the whole thing could go haywire make no sense. It is his own party. All we are asking for is a chance to bring the key players in, and there are about a dozen of them, one by one, to tell their stories, confess the truth and answer questions. If he has nothing to hide, surely he will agree to that.

Here I am, standing before members, speaking about the cover-up budget. Just like the other night when the Prime Minister forced his members to stay here for 30 hours to preserve his cover-up, I am inviting him to do what I am sure he would enjoy doing, which is to bring an end to my remarks. I am sure that there have been many days when the Prime Minister would have wished that I would stop talking. This one time, I am giving him the chance to do it. If he walks in those doors, and I know he is here because I saw him earlier, and sits down and says, "The cover-up is over. The committee will have an opportunity to study this scandal—

• (1800)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, as you know and as I am sure the member for Carleton knows, it is inappropriate to either directly or indirectly reference the attendance of a member in or not in this chamber, which he just did with the Prime Minister. I would ask that you, Mr. Speaker, would inform him of the rule and ask him to discontinue doing that.

The Budget

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his intervention. He is right that the rules around debate ask that members not make reference to either the presence or absence of members in the chamber. I did note the hon. member for Carleton's reference in that respect. I do not want to editorialize on what he said but the way I took it, it was not making a specific reference to the Prime Minister's absence but referring to the fact that he had been here earlier in the day and remains here. It seemed a little general in nature, but nonetheless I caution the hon. member for Carleton. This is something that of course members should take note of when they are delivering their remarks.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, I just want to be very clear, because I was listening extremely closely, that the member mentioned the Prime Minister was in the building, which did not say that he was not in the chamber. Being in the building he could easily have been in the chamber.

However, I have noted that my hon. colleague has not mentioned the budget in the last 45 minutes and it is important always to go back to the budget. Perhaps he could mention the budget and then continue because I do not want him to lose his stream of thought from the moment when the member for Kingston and the Islands said that the Prime Minister was not in the House. I would not say that he said the Prime Minister was not in the House, when the member said he was in the building.

The Deputy Speaker: I think we have in fact settled the matter with respect to the reference to the absence or presence of members.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay makes another point, about the relevance aspect. I have been following the comments of the hon. member for Carleton. Members will know that members who are speaking on the budget are given a great extent of latitude with respect to budget matters because of the scope of such debates. I note that the hon. member for Carleton references how his remarks relate to the budget, so we will continue.

The hon. member for Carleton.

● (1805)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for remarking on the presence or absence of the Prime Minister. I will say this. Some people bring happiness wherever they go; others bring happiness whenever they go. With that, I will continue my remarks.

What I am seeking in the case of the Prime Minister is that he come to the justice committee. What I was saying earlier was that if he were to rise in the House of Commons right now and say that the cover-up is over and the justice committee will be allowed to finish its investigation, I would terminate my speech. I know there have been many times when the Prime Minister would have given a great fortune to make me stop speaking. I am offering him the chance right now to do that for free, in the sense that the truth will set him free. That is how we can end this speech earlier than it would otherwise go. I assure the members across the way, who have endured me thus far, that this will continue. I can tell they are already tiring, to which I will not take any offence whatsoever.

I was just about to address the international component of this scandal and note the interest the OECD has now taken in the SNC-Lavalin corruption affair. We are party to an international convention against corruption, bribery and fraud that requires the independent

prosecution of international corruption. The OECD has expressed concern that the Prime Minister may have politically interfered with the role of the former attorney general in attempting to block the prosecution of a company accused of well over \$100 million of international fraud and corruption.

There is no doubt that such international infamy is bad for Canada. We are known as a country of the rule of law. Businesses around the world have always said that, for all of Canada's strengths and weaknesses, they can always count on fair treatment in our court systems and courts of law in the event of a dispute; that our governments do not typically confiscate property, abrogate contracts or carry out any other form of lawlessness; and that it is a safe and secure place for the world to do business.

That reputation is precious to our economy, and the existence of a public scandal where the former attorney general has accused the Prime Minister of personally interfering in a prosecution jeopardizes that precious reputation, thus the interest, and even inquiry, that the OECD has now taken in this scandal. I say that not only because of the international consequences, but to illustrate how serious this matter is.

Countries around the world do not often take notice of political controversies in their neighbouring jurisdictions. Large international and multinational organizations do not typically get involved in the latest political controversy in France, the United Kingdom or Canada, for that matter. This would have to be an extremely serious affair for an international body like the OECD to consider a public comment and statement of that nature. However, we had such a statement, which has now been rendered public for all eyes to see. It is our duty to reassure the global business and legal community that Canada does have the rule of law, that everyone is equal under that law and that politicians have no business monkeying around with the law.

● (1810)

We have the ability to do that by bringing the Prime Minister before the justice committee, along with all of the others who were alleged to have participated in the interference with the former attorney general's role, letting them speak the truth under oath, and letting the committee, which is majority Liberal controlled, issue a report with clear findings. That is all we are asking and most Canadians would consider that pretty reasonable.

One argument we have heard from across the way is that we have to get busy doing other things. I could not agree more. If I can be very blunt about it, I would rather be talking about the Liberal carbon tax or the broken promise on the deficit or a number of other extremely unpopular policy decisions that the Prime Minister has taken. Were we to shift to those failed and unpopular policies just for political purposes, we would be leaving behind a very important loose end with respect to the protection of our justice system under the law.

The Budget

We are not simply going to try to score political points by talking about something that might be otherwise more politically advantageous. Instead, we are going to stay focused on bringing the government to account for this political interference in our legal system. The reason for that is while it might not be in our political interest to stay focused on concepts like preserving an independent judiciary and legal system, it is the right thing for the country.

There will be time to debate the carbon tax, which kicked in today in Ontario, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Manitoba. There will be time to debate the Prime Minister's broken promise to balance the budget this year. There will be plenty of time for those things and we will debate them. More than that, we will solve them with proposals of our own that will lower the tax burden and balance the budget.

That said, now is the time for accountability, and now is the time for us to correct this grievous wrong that the Prime Minister has exacted upon our justice system. We have given him a pathway to do that. It is very simple: Support our motion at committee to have a full-scale investigation. The Prime Minister should come to testify and bring along all of the staff members who participated in the cover-up. Let them all speak freely without any restrictions on what they can say, and then allow the committee to issue a final report that Canadians can read before the next election. That is a very reasonable step forward, which we think any prime minister who has nothing to hide would be prepared to do.

So far, he has not been prepared to do that. As we know, he has shut down two parliamentary investigations, one at the justice committee and the other at the ethics committee. He has refused calls for an independent, non-partisan public inquiry. We have no other venue in which the truth can come out but the parliamentary committees that I have just listed. If the Prime Minister would merely agree to let us move forward with those investigations, we can get the truth out. Then, we can get back to the debates that we all want to have, which are, again, the very unpopular and damaging Liberal carbon tax, the Prime Minister's broken promise on deficits, his failures on the global scene, his disastrous trip to India, his Twitter war with Saudi Arabia, his climb down to Donald Trump in accepting one concession after another in the USMCA and his decision to kill three pipelines. All of those things merit debate, and we as Conservatives want to have and win those debates, and we will.

However, the Prime Minister cannot simply bury this corruption scandal under \$41 billion of deficit spending that he is piling up in this cover-up budget.

• (1815)

That is why I am standing here today and giving these extended remarks to all of our colleagues before the House of Commons.

Where are we today with this cover-up budget? We have a government that is using public money to try to drown out a scandal. The Liberals have added \$60 billion to our national debt, three times what the Prime Minister promised. Instead of balancing the budget this year, we have another \$20-billion deficit, debts that will inevitably lead to higher taxes if he is re-elected.

We have billions of dollars of additional spending announced in the budget without any way to pay for them except piling on more

and more debt, and we are entering a period of high levels of risk in our world economy already saddled with excessive deficits and debt, with the budget significantly out of balance, leaving us no buffer whatsoever to cushion us against the blows that the world could very well deal us again.

It is so different from the way we went into the last global recession. Governments, both Liberal and Conservative, made the responsible decisions in the late 1990s and early 2000s to pay off hundreds of billions of dollars of debt. I credit the Liberal government of Jean Chrétien for being part of that consensus of balanced budget, which followed with Harper and Flaherty, who also paid off \$40 billion of debt, so that when the great crisis struck in 2008, we were prepared and we had a rock-solid foundation. The reality is that every country went into deficit, but Canada had the smallest deficit. It was the last to go into the recession and the first to come out. It created a million jobs and left the country with a balanced budget.

If we were to have that kind of financial crisis today, we would go into it already \$20 billion in the red, which means that every single dollar in additional economic damage would be paid for with borrowed money above and beyond that \$20 billion per year. As more people go on EI and draw from the system, fewer people would be paying income and payroll tax. As corporate profits drop, corporate tax revenues fall with them. All those things would only worsen the budgetary balance of the country. That is precisely why it is important to pay down debt during the good times, to prepare for rainy days ahead.

Instead, the Prime Minister has squandered his inheritance. He inherited good fortune in his own life, and he inherited good fortune as a prime minister. In the latter job, he has squandered it. He took a balanced budget and turned it into a massive deficit. He took low taxes and turned them into high taxes. Now he is spending our children's tomorrow on his today. He is doing that because he has made a political calculation that if Canadians see dollar signs flying at them in the form of massive pre-election government spending, they will completely forget about the scandal that has engulfed his government and they will say, "What happened to that SNC-Lavalin thing?" "I don't know. Just work on catching those dollars as they fly by."

However, Canadians have not been fooled. In my community of Carleton, the wise people of Manotick, Stittsville, Greely and so many other wonderful neighbourhoods have been so fixated on protecting the legal system in our country against the corruption the Prime Minister has tried to administer against it. I have knocked on tens of thousands of doors, and not one person has said a positive word about the cover-up budget, because they saw it for exactly what it was.

The Budget

●(1820)

Canadians knew exactly what the Prime Minister was doing. They knew that he was carrying out the Kathleen Wynne three-step. We all know the Kathleen Wynne three-step: one, get into a massive scandal; two, massive deficit spending to distract from it; and three, massive tax increases to pay for it all after the election. That is the McGuinty-Wynne three-step. It was designed by its architect, Gerald Butts, and it is exactly what we have in the present budget.

It did not work, though. It is a testament to the wisdom of the Canadian people that they were capable of ignoring every ounce of political bribery that the government attempted to bestow upon them. As they saw their Prime Minister running around throwing wads of cash into the air, Canadians looked a little more carefully. They realized that he was pulling the money out of their wallets and said they were not going to be distracted: “Now, let us get some answers with respect to the SNC-Lavalin corruption scandal.”

That is why, wherever I go, people are telling me, “Get to the truth. Do not let the Prime Minister cover this up. It has gone too far. He has crossed the line.”

I am here with an offer to the government on the cover-up. Come to the justice committee, answer the questions, do it on the record, let the committee members write a report and let Canadians decide on the truth in October. Do not cling to the idea that it can all be swept under the rug today and then hope to hobble the way to October without anybody finding out what Liberals did.

It has not worked. It cannot work. There is too much scrutiny and too much interest in finding the truth for the Prime Minister to get away with covering it up any longer. The more he tries, the more difficult it becomes, and the harder and harder it is to prevent the truth from seeping out.

Here we are today, gathered in the House of Commons, the House of the common people, with an opportunity to convert this scandal into a moment of accountability, to prove that this chamber is capable of unearthing hidden facts and making known hidden truths, and holding to account the doers of the deeds. Surely, if the Prime Minister has nothing to hide, then he will agree to allow Parliament to do that.

I note now that I have been speaking directly to the Prime Minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, for a long time. I will note now to some of the members of the Liberal backbench. There have been some courageous individuals in their midst, who have been willing to do the right thing, who have put aside their own political interest and their careers to speak truth, first, to power, and then truth to the public. Liberals might look at them and say, “Jeez, I do not want to go down that road. The Prime Minister will grind me under his foot.”

Liberals should take another look, because they have something that could be preserved, their integrity. They go to their communities and they are rightly greeted as heroes. I read this weekend that the former attorney general was honoured with a great feast in her community. People recognized the integrity she has demonstrated in doing her job. They have seen that what she did was very difficult and very rare.

●(1825)

Many sitting on the Liberal backbench might say that they do not have the courage to take on a prime minister, or that they think it is in their political interest to put their heads down, barrel forward, forget about the truth and just get through to October. Then after that, they can worry about whether the truth gets out. However, they will be remembered if that is the attitude they take, because eventually the truth will come out and the members who helped the Prime Minister cover it up will have been exposed as his servants rather than the people's servants.

We have to remind ourselves that we do not work for the government in this place; we work for the common people. That is why it is called the House of Commons. Sometimes people get the organization chart backward. It is the people at the top, under them is the House of Commons and its members, and under them the ministers and the government. That is why the word “minister” has its root in the word “servant”. It is because the ministers were first servants to the Crown, but ultimately servants to the commons, because the commoners can fire the government at any given time.

I know that some members have just been startled and think I am suggesting they should vote for non-confidence. They do not have to go that far that fast. Why do we not start by having a full investigation? What if Liberal backbenchers stood and voted in favour of that investigation in the House of Commons? What is the worst that could happen to them? Many of them have been passed over for cabinet already, and if truth be told, despite their thoughts to the contrary, do not have any hope of getting into cabinet anytime soon, regardless. However, they do have their integrity and could preserve that integrity by voting in favour of an end to the cover-up, by allowing witnesses to appear and the truth to be told. Then they could go back to their constituents and say that the party bosses came down hard on them, but they did the right thing. They would not be in cabinet but would be good servants of the people. That is why I am asking members across the way to join with Conservatives and put country ahead of party, to let the truth come out.

In October, all Liberal members are going to have to go back to their communities—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Maybe sooner.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Wait a second, I just heard a rumour from across the way, from the deputy House leader. I said October would be the election and he yelled out “maybe sooner”. Maybe a cat has leapt out of the bag, or maybe the deputy House leader has let out of the bag that we could be going into the cover-up election. We had the cover-up budget and now we will have the cover-up election. Get the election done before the truth comes out is perhaps the political strategy across the way.

If I were called upon to give advice to members across the way, and it is a rare occasion that they ever ask for my advice, I would say this: A cover-up is not going to work. The people of Canada are too smart. They have a very good idea of what is going on because they have seen so much evidence so far. They are not going to be fooled by a snap election, an overly expensive budget or an attempt to use a majority to slap down the truth and punish the whistle-blowers who told it.

Private Members' Business

For their own sakes, they should stand up for what is right, stand up to their Prime Minister, do what is best for their constituents, protect the integrity of our legal system, uphold all that is good about our institutions, lock arms with others who agree, put their party behind their country, look their constituents in the eye and tell them that they did the right thing, not for their party boss but for the people they represent. Then and only then will they have the ability to look their constituents in the eye with total confidence that they did the right thing.

• (1830)

I will be pleased to return to this place and continue this debate at a moment convenient to this House, unless between now and that time the Prime Minister is willing to signal to our party, in writing, that he is prepared to end the cover-up and allow the investigation to continue.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton will have the opportunity to continue his remarks when the House next gets back to debate on the question.

It being 6:30 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 30(7), the House will now proceed to the consideration of Bill S-238 under Private Members' Business.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

BAN ON SHARK FIN IMPORTATION AND EXPORTATION ACT

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP) moved that Bill S-238, An Act to amend the Fisheries Act and the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Inter-provincial Trade Act (importation and exportation of shark fins), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of Bill S-238. I would like to thank the member for Beaches—East York for seconding this bill, and I pay tribute to the hon. Senator Michael MacDonald for his tireless work getting Bill S-238 passed through the Senate. I would also like to acknowledge the work of his staff, Ewan Dunn and Kathryn Dunn. It has been a pleasure working with them on this critical issue.

This bill would ban the importation and exportation of shark fins, into and out of Canada, that are not attached to a shark carcass. It would provide an exception for ministerial permit if the importation of fins were for scientific research and would benefit the survival of the species. It would enshrine into law a prohibition on the practice of shark finning.

Shark finning has been banned in Canada under licensing conditions since 1994, but shockingly, the importation of shark fins continues to be permitted. Since 2011, five private member's bills banning the trade in shark fins have been introduced. In that time, nearly one billion sharks have been butchered and killed for their fins, shrinking the international shark population and driving dozens of shark species to near extinction. Last year, Canada imported

170,000 kilograms of shark fins, which is a 60% increase over 2012 levels.

Shark finning is the horrific practice of cutting the fins from living sharks and discarding the remainder of the shark at sea. The sharks then drown, starve to death or are eaten alive by other fish. It is a brutal fishing practice.

As top predators, sharks play a key role in maintaining ocean health. Dr. Dirk Steinke, adjunct professor, Centre for Biodiversity Genomics, University of Guelph, testified to this at the Senate fisheries committee in December 2017. He said:

sharks are not only the most vulnerable but, also, probably the most important when you speak of an entire ocean as an ecosystem. They maintain all the species below them in the food chain or in the food network. For us, as scientists, they serve as a very important indicator of ocean health because we can immediately see that if they are not doing well, then something along the food network is also not doing well and we can probe further into that.

Unfortunately, due to shark finning, shark populations are plummeting around the world. The International Union for Conservation of Nature reports that a quarter of all shark species are threatened with extinction as a result of shark finning. Some shark populations have dropped by a stunning 99% over the past 50 years.

The best way to curb illegal finning is to stop the international trade in shark fins, which has been linked to organized crime, as Rob Stewart's films, *Sharkwater*, and the sequel, *Sharkwater Extinction*, clearly demonstrate.

In 2013, I tabled Bill C-380, but it was defeated by five votes. Many MPs who are now in the governing party supported that bill, and I hope they will support Bill S-238.

I was honoured to work with my friend, Canadian filmmaker and conservationist, Rob Stewart, whose 2006 award-winning documentary film *Sharkwater* shed light on the horrific practice of shark finning. Rob tragically died last year filming the sequel, *Sharkwater Extinction*. However, Rob's parents, Sandy and Brian Stewart, have continued his work educating the public on the need to protect sharks and on the essential role sharks play in our ecosystem. I encourage all MPs and the public to see this award-winning film.

Shark finning is decimating one of the most critical species on the planet to satisfy the demand for shark fin soup, yet the fins have virtually no flavour and add zero nutritional value. Canada can become a world leader in shark conservation and ocean stewardship by adopting this legislation. With a federal election expected October 21, it is imperative that Bill S-238 gets through debate, is reviewed by the fisheries and oceans standing committee and receives third reading and royal assent, all before the election is called. Sharks and the marine ecosystems that depend on them cannot wait for another election.

Private Members' Business

•(1835)

Canadians are watching, and they are waiting for Parliament to act. A petition at Change.org calling on Parliament to support Bill S-238 has received over a quarter-million signatures. I implore all MPs to pass this bill and put an end to the destructive practice.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge several people and organizations that have done tremendous work on this. I mentioned Senator Mike MacDonald and Brian and Sandy Stewart. Oceana Canada, Humane Society International/Canada, International Fund for Animal Welfare and numerous municipalities, conservation groups and concerned citizens right across the country are also working to pass resolutions to support Bill S-238. I thank them for all their hard work.

I would like to encourage all MPs to move this through the House as quickly as possible.

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for presenting this bill and for his speech. He would be well aware that there are several municipalities in Canada that have attempted to deal with this through bylaws. I would invite him to offer some comment on the jurisdictions that are impacted and the reason for federal legislation, given that certain municipalities have attempted to take this on.

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. Over the years, municipalities have wanted to see action happen across the country. They could not wait for federal, provincial or territorial jurisdictions to move, so they have acted. They have been frustrated over the years, because if we have a patchwork quilt of legislation in different municipalities, business can just move from one municipality to avoid legislation in that municipality, for instance Toronto, and operate, for instance, in Oakville. Certainly I heard from consultations back in 2012, before I introduced the bill in the House, that this was a concern.

What I heard from even restaurateurs and industry was that they wanted a definitive response, a definitive bill, that would level the playing field. A national ban would level the playing field. It would help municipalities and provinces that want to do the right thing. A ban on importing would assist them in dealing with shark conservation and would end this practice and put a stop to it.

•(1840)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague and say what enormous respect I have for him in that he has used his many years in the House to fight for the issue of the ocean ecosystem and has used the opportunities of the House and his role as a member of Parliament to advocate for ocean health and the shark population that is being gutted around the world.

Why does my hon. colleague feel so moved to lead this fight, and why is it so important for not just Canadians but people around the world to take ocean health seriously?

Mr. Fin Donnelly: Mr. Speaker, when I first got to this place, it was a big concern that Canada, as an ocean nation, paid a lot of attention to our fishery but did not pay as much attention to the health of our oceans. I thought it was very important, especially back

in 2012, when I read a United Nations report on the state of the world's oceans that said that our top predators, globally, in all oceans, were plummeting, including sharks.

Sharks play a key role in maintaining the health of the ecosystem. There are many threats facing the ocean. A changing climate, which is impacting the oceans at a tremendous rate, is also a big part of the problem.

One of the things we need to do as a nation is play a leadership role. Banning the importation of shark fins is a way Canada can play a stewardship role and send a clear message to other countries that this is the right thing to do. It can encourage other countries, such as our neighbour to the south and the European Union, to also ban the importation of shark fins so that we can see those shark populations come back and flourish and we can have a healthy fishery and healthy oceans. I think Canada wants to see this.

I will say that 81% of Canadians, in a poll done a number of years ago, wanted to see the practice of shark finning banned. There is tremendous support across the country from individuals and organizations that want to see this practice stopped. They want to see shark populations return to a healthy balance in our ecosystem.

Canada has an opportunity. We have to act now. The government needs to act before the summer, before the House rises in June, by fast-tracking this legislation to the fisheries committee so that we can get this legislation passed and enshrined before October 21.

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill S-238, an act to amend the Fisheries Act and the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act, also known as the ban on shark fin importation and exportation act.

The Government of Canada remains strongly committed to managing shark populations worldwide, with conservation and protection goals a priority.

Shark finning refers to the practice of harvesting sharks and removing fins from the live animal, only to return the debilitated animal, alive, to the water. The maimed animal then drowns as it sinks, powerless, to the bottom of the ocean.

I hope that image causes distress. It should. Canadians have told us that they are appalled by it and that they want us to put an end to it. Bill S-238 aims to do that, and it is a good thing.

[*Translation*]

My House of Commons and Senate colleagues are probably all familiar with the film *Sharkwater*, which came out in 2007. This captivating documentary starring Rob Stewart and Paul Watson is at times so shocking that it is difficult to watch.

The film follows the biologist-conservationist duo who joined forces to fight the poachers who kill animals illegally for their fins. The film, which contrasts gorgeous underwater scenes with images of horrifying animal cruelty, set off a global movement against shark finning.

Private Members' Business

● (1845)

[English]

This past fall, Mr. Stewart was again featured in a sequel to the same documentary, entitled *Sharkwater Extinction*. This more recent documentary exposes the continued, rampant existence of a significant illegal shark fin industry. At the core of this documentary is, once again, the cruel treatment of sharks and their rapid decline toward extinction. Also featured are the criminal conspiracies and the violent corruption, which often put Stewart and his crew at risk, that are linked to the still very lucrative illegal shark finning industry. Sadly, Mr. Stewart died in January 2017 while he was in Florida filming *Sharkwater Extinction*.

The original documentary and its sequel are making their mark around the world. There is increased compassion and sympathy for the once feared and misunderstood shark and a growing concern that we are slaughtering them to extinction and governments are doing nothing to stop it.

The fact is that in Canada, shark finning has been illegal since 1994. However, and this is where much of the concern lies, importing fins from other countries that do not ban the practice is still permitted. This has made it difficult for municipalities to impose bans through bylaws. In fact, since 2011, several Canadian cities have attempted to impose bans on possessing, selling or consuming shark fin products. Notably, Brantford, Oakville, Toronto, Newmarket and Mississauga, in Ontario, and Calgary, in Alberta, all had such bans at one time. Some still do today.

[Translation]

There are problems with local bans, however. Some have been challenged in court and overturned. While the courts agree that shark finning is inhumane, the main problem is that municipal governments have no authority over shark fin importation. The lack of legitimate finality at the local level means there is a growing need for a federal response to this important issue.

[English]

As we heard, in 2013 a private member's bill to ban shark fin imports in Canada failed in this House. We are now faced with another opportunity, provided to us by Senator Michael L. MacDonald, in the form of Bill S-238. I ask that we carefully consider Bill S-238 and its proposed legislative solutions to the growing global issue of shark finning.

This proposed bill to ban the importation and exportation of shark fins or parts of shark fins that are not attached to a shark carcass, or any derivatives of shark fins, has a tremendous amount of merit. It would indeed be an indication of Canada's global leadership and position against the cruel practice of shark finning to amend the Fisheries Act and enshrine the prohibition of shark finning in Canada. However, I carefully followed the debate on this bill in the other place and, as raised in the other chamber, Bill S-238's proposed amendments to the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act, WAPPRITA, prohibiting the import and export of shark fins may be problematic.

Implementing Bill S-238, as amended by the other place, has a number of implications. With respect to WAPPRITA, the proposed amendments do not discriminate between sustainably harvested

sharks and shark products, and shark fins that are the product of shark finning. This would be inconsistent with Canada's international trade law obligations because it would pose a risk of violating non-discrimination obligations. A ban on the import of shark fin products and their derivatives without banning all internal trade of the products would violate this obligation.

● (1850)

[Translation]

In fact, a study of the legal implications of an almost complete ban on the importing of shark fins by Canada, as proposed by Bill S-238, revealed that this would very likely result in the violation of our obligations to the World Trade Organization.

Trade measures can be an effective means of fighting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and of promoting sustainable fishing practices. However, these requirements must be consistent with Canada's international trade obligations as a member of the World Trade Organization. I am sure there is a way forward that will allow us to comply with our trade obligations and, more importantly, to put an end to shark finning.

[English]

I will take a few seconds at this time to summarize.

Shark finning has been banned in Canada since 1994 through the licence conditions administered under the Fishery (General) Regulations, a regulation made under the Fisheries act.

In 2016, Canada implemented a mandatory fins-attached management measure for all pelagic shark landings across Canada. All harvesters are required to land pelagic sharks with the fins naturally attached.

Bill S-238 proposes to add a prohibition on shark finning in the Fisheries Act that would enshrine the ban of shark finning in the Fisheries Act, as well as banning importation through WAPPRITA.

The government is committed to ensuring that we end the practice of shark finning while ensuring we uphold our international trade commitments.

[Translation]

I am convinced that shark finning is a cruel practice. As a Canadian and a steward of our natural environment, I feel I have a responsibility to prevent cruelty towards any animal and the decimation of any species. That is why I look forward to a rigorous debate on this bill in committee.

Private Members' Business

[English]

Bill S-238 is a noble indication that Canadians feel the same way. Perhaps the means by which the bill proposes to achieve its ends are not perfect, but I believe it is our duty here in this place to find a way to do whatever is within our power to stop shark finning. I am confident that this is the right thing to do.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak this evening in support of Bill S-238, an act that would ban the import and export of shark fins in Canada. I will be brief because we would all like to see the bill quickly passed here and given royal assent before Parliament rises in June.

Five or more similar bills have been debated in this place over the years, and unfortunately none has passed. It would be unfortunate if we missed the opportunity once again to pass this important legislation.

I would like to thank my friend, Senator Mike MacDonald from Nova Scotia, for introducing the bill into the Senate, and I would also like to thank my colleague, the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam, for sponsoring it in this place. It is very similar to a bill that he put forward as a private member's bill in 2013.

As others have said, shark finning is the practice of catching a shark, cutting off its fins and throwing it back in the ocean alive, where it dies a miserable death, usually from drowning. Sharks have to keep moving through the water to breathe, to get water moving across their gills, and without their fins, they just sink to the bottom and drown. It is barbaric and it is wasteful. Most of it is illegal, and it is fuelled by simple greed.

We might think it is not a common practice, but unfortunately that is not the case. Over 100 million sharks are killed every year to satisfy the demand for shark fin soup, and some estimates are double that, at 200 million sharks. Canada's share in this slaughter is increasing. We imported 180,000 kilograms of shark fins in 2017, up from 106,000 kilograms in 2012. We are the largest importer of shark fins outside of East Asia.

This practice is significantly impacting shark fin populations around the world, and it does not just affect the sharks: It is radically changing ocean ecosystems. Imagine 100 million bears disappearing from our forests or 100 million lions disappearing from the plains of Africa.

Also, 141 species of sharks around the world are now classified as threatened with extinction or near threatened with extinction. The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada has assessed six species of sharks from Canadian waters and has listed three as endangered and three as being of special concern.

Some shark species are particularly hard hit by finning. The scalloped hammerhead has declined over 90%—one study suggested a loss of 98%—over a period of 30 years off the east coast of North America. Data from the same coast indicates that the population of the oceanic whitetip shark, once one of the most abundant animals in the world's oceans, has declined by over 70% between 1992 and 2000. That is 70% in only eight years. This once abundant species is rapidly becoming functionally extinct.

Before I had the privilege to sit in this place, I was an ecologist who did a lot of work on species at risk. One thing I noticed over that career is our casual disregard for the destruction of populations of animals living in our oceans, lakes and rivers, be they fish, sharks, turtles or whales. We simply do not seem to worry about things we cannot see. Because we cannot easily see what goes on below the surface of the ocean, we too often destroy populations before we are aware of what we have really done. I can mention the impact on whale populations around the world, Atlantic salmon, northern cod, and now the sharks of the world.

I will finish by mentioning, as others have, that last October I had the honour of meeting the parents of Rob Stewart at an early screening of Rob's magnificent movie *Sharkwater Extinction*. Rob was a remarkable young Canadian devoted to the conservation of marine ecosystems, and especially sharks. His movie *Sharkwater* was hailed around the world, but tragically he drowned while filming the sequel, *Sharkwater Extinction*. His parents have bravely worked to finish the movie and it is now being shown across the country.

I urge everyone here and everyone across Canada to see this important documentary. It will inspire people and change their view on sharks forever.

• (1855)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on a couple of comments. The member who spoke just before me made a recommendation to watch a specific show.

Over the last number of years, one of the things I have found is that there has been a great deal of attention from producers to better portray sharks and the role they play in our oceans in a more fair fashion. I believe Canada has demonstrated significant leadership in terms of our oceans and showing just how important they are to the world.

That should not surprise people. Canada is surrounded by three oceans, from the east, west and north. Then we have the U.S. below us, to the south. Manitoba is not quite landlocked because of Churchill. However, provinces like Saskatchewan, Alberta and others, even though they do not necessarily have direct links to the oceans, have an understanding and an appreciation of just how important our oceans are to the world.

There is a beautiful documentary production called *The Blue Planet*. I have had the opportunity to watch it on several occasions. It gives a better sense of what is in our oceans. There are a number of movies or documentaries that deal with the ocean.

More and more, I have found that Canadians are becoming sympathetic and want to see a government take action to protect our oceans. What we have seen over the last couple of years is that we have a government that has been listening to what Canadians have to say about our oceans. We see that in the legislation the government has brought in to protect our oceans and in its budgetary measures. The government has invested hundreds of millions of dollars, in terms of protecting our oceans.

Private Members' Business

The parliamentary secretary for oceans was talking about that graphic visual. I, too, have seen that visual, where these boats and trawlers are out in our oceans, hauling in sharks, taking the fins off the shark and then throwing the remaining body back into the ocean. One can only imagine the impact that is having on the animal, floating to the bottom and ultimately drowning.

That is not to mention the sheer numbers. We hear a great deal about millions. The original speaker to Bill S-238 made reference to close to a billion over the last number of years. I do not know how statistically accurate that might be, but what we do know is that it is having a very profound, negative impact on our shark population. That is something that all Canadians should be concerned about.

At the end of the day, looking at this particular piece of legislation, and I know there might be others who want to contribute to this debate, the government has been fairly clear that it would be good to see the legislation sent to committee.

I know there are some concerns. It is important that we hear from some of the community members as to what their concerns might be with respect to the legislation and the impact that it might have. I can appreciate that, here in Canada, through our fisheries, in order to acquire a licence, there is a certain commitment given that it is already illegal for someone fishing to take fins off a shark and bring that commodity in.

● (1900)

Shark finning is already illegal because of the licensing requirement.

Having said that, it is important for us to recognize that there is importing and exporting of shark fins which have been taken from a trolley of sorts, and the carcasses of sharks are being thrown back into the water. This is in good part what the bill is trying to focus on, if I understand it correctly. It focuses on cases in which fins are being taken off a shark, the shark is being put back into the water and those fins are ultimately being brought into the country through importation for whatever use they might have. This legislation would make it illegal to import or export fins.

There are a great number of Canadians who would in fact be very sympathetic to the legislation. I have received a few emails from constituents of mine who have expressed an interest in this particular issue.

I appreciate that the Senate is the originating body that brought forward this legislation. However, as has been pointed out, it is not the first time that this type of legislation has been brought to the House, although I believe it one of the first times that we are debating it. I think there is a sense of optimism that if we can move it to the committee stage, some amendments could follow that would make the legislation even better and more acceptable for a larger percentage of the population.

I talked about the importance of the legislation, but at the end of the day, the shark is just one species that is mentioned. The government also needs to look at ways that it can improve the stock of many different species in our oceans. I am thinking of our killer whale populations. In the province of Manitoba, there has always been concern, for example, over our beluga whales in the Churchill region. There is an issue regarding the salmon run. At times, these

issues all cause a great deal of concern to stakeholders and industry representatives, and there is no doubt that a great number of individuals have a vested interest when governments bring forward legislation of this nature.

That is the reason it is important that we continue to go through the process. It is with a hope that at the end of the day, we will see legislation that continues what started about 20 years ago, from what I understand, with respect to shark harvesting, which was to be conducted through our fishery licensing process.

It is not as if this is a new issue; it is an issue that has been around for many years now. In the past, governments have attempted to deal with it while working with Canadians. We have seen a desire to look at what other countries around the world are doing and at how we might be able to demonstrate some leadership on this very important issue.

I have indicated in the past that Canada often carries, I would suggest, a great deal more clout on the international scene than one would expect, given our population in comparison to the population of the world. I think one of the things we can capitalize on is the reputation that Canada has. We have oceans surrounding our nation and we have a vested interest in them. Countries around the world recognize the importance of what Canada has been able to accomplish.

The bill could, after moving to committee and passing through it with amendments, make a significant difference. I appreciate the opportunity to share a few thoughts on the record with respect to it.

● (1905)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to Bill S-238, an act to amend the Fisheries Act and the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act, which is also referred to as an act on the importation and exportation of shark fins.

Bill S-238 proposes to amend the Fisheries Act, with the goal of prohibiting the practice of shark finning. It also proposes amendments to the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act, which would prohibit the import and export of shark fins that are not attached to a shark carcass or any derivatives of shark fins.

Shark finning is the practice of removing fins from sharks and discarding the carcasses at sea. This practice has been effectively banned in Canada, as we have heard in this House already this evening, since 1994. It is prohibited through the Department of Fisheries and Oceans' regulatory framework as a condition of licences issued under the Fisheries Act.

However, there is no doubt that shark finning and the illegal shark fin trade have had a devastating impact on global shark populations, as we have been hearing this evening. Sadly, it is more efficient for fishermen to harvest the fins and discard the carcasses at sea, given the high value of the fins. Loading a vessel with the entire carcass is burdensome and less profitable. In Canada, sharks are harvested as bycatch.

Private Members' Business

We have heard the concerns of many Canadians who signed many petitions supporting government action to ban the shark finning practice. The intent of Bill S-238 is consistent with the government's commitment to sustainable, science-based management of stocks, including sharks. In Canada, the practice of shark finning has in effect been banned since 1994 through licence conditions.

In March of this year, the government implemented a fisheries management change requiring all sharks caught in Canadian fisheries to be landed with their fins naturally attached. This means that all harvesters are required to land sharks with fins attached. Through enforcement provisions, these fisheries are also subject to 100% independent dockside monitoring to ensure compliance.

Canada represents less than 1.5% of global shark fin imports. In 2017, outside of Asia, countries such as Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States all imported more shark fin products than Canada. No shark fin products have been exported from Canada since 2015. That said, Canada has a unique opportunity to demonstrate global leadership on this very important issue.

There are provisions in the Fisheries Act and its associated regulations to provide a mechanism that can be used to address the issue of shark finning by Canadian fishing vessels. However, Bill S-238 proposes to add a prohibition against shark finning in the Fisheries Act. By enshrining the ban in legislation, Canada would strengthen its approach to protecting endangered sharks and exhibit global leadership on this very important issue. This would also shore up enforcement and penalties associated with any breach of licence with penalties for chargeable offences under the Fisheries Act.

Bill S-238 also proposes amendments to the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act that would prohibit the import and export of shark fins that are not attached to a shark carcass.

I understand that concerns were raised in the other place about the trade implications of banning the import and export of shark fins and their derivatives in this manner. In particular, the national treatment obligation of the World Trade Organization requires imported and domestic goods to be treated equally. A ban on the import of shark fins that are not attached to shark carcasses or any derivatives of shark fins without banning all international trade of the products, as heard in the other place, would likely violate this obligation.

● (1910)

In order for importers to bring in shark fins, the bill would require that the captured shark remains whole until the product reaches Canada. This would be a significant increase in the burden on the shark fin trade industry, including for processors, exporters and importers. Requiring that fins remain attached until a product is imported would also be a significant shift in the global standard. It would create a significant burden for foreign counterparts and disrupt trade flows for importers and exporters as shark meat and fins are often destined for separate markets.

I indeed support the intent of the legislation and I hope this unintended consequence is something the committee can further examine. Make no mistake, shark finning is a cruel practice that needs to be addressed. Bill S-238 is a step in the right direction. Similar measures have already been implemented by some of our

key partners, such as the United States and the European Union. These mandate the domestic landing of entire shark carcasses with the fin attached, which is agreed upon as an effective way of preventing finning. Landing the entire shark carcass also encourages the full use of the shark and not just the fins.

That is why I look forward to the debate at committee and to hearing from witnesses so that the committee can ensure the bill meets its intent while respecting the existing trade responsibilities. I commend Senator MacDonald and, indeed, the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam for championing a cause that I know Canadians from coast to coast support.

● (1915)

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour today to rise to speak to Bill S-238, an act to amend the Fisheries Act and the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act with regard to importation and exportation of shark fins. As we just heard from my colleague, I am also proud to rise and speak in favour of this piece of legislation.

It is a very important piece of legislation, and I would like to thank the member of the other House who was mentioned, Senator Michael MacDonald, for raising this issue. The other House has given a lot of time and debate to the issue and has brought forward some very timely and important discussions that need to be happening concerning Canadian legislation at this point in time.

I would also like to thank the member for Port Moody—Coquitlam for bringing forward the issue. I know that he is a passionate advocate for environmental issues, and in particular aquatic issues. It is very timely that we are talking about the issue of shark finning at this point in Canada.

As we have heard others say, shark finning is essentially a cruel practice in which fins are taken off sharks and the sharks are returned to the ocean to die. Although we have had different bans on this practice through regulation and through the Fisheries Act, we know that it still happens in Canada and internationally, and it is time that we look at ways to strengthen the ban.

As a member of the environment committee, I know the important role that committees can play in debating legislation and looking at how we can improve legislation, and it would be very appropriate as we move through the debate and the legislative process to get this to a committee, probably the fisheries committee, and look at what improvements this House would like to make to the proposed legislation and look at how we can end, once and for all, a cruel practice and see how we can better control the practice of harvesting all products from sharks should they be captured.

Private Members' Business

I would also like to take a minute to talk about the ecological impacts that result from this kind of shark finning practice in Canadian waters and internationally, because it is very much a global issue.

We know that sharks play a very important role within the marine environment as a predator, and they can work on controlling undesirable species. They deserve to exist. Although they are often looked at as an evil player within the aquatic system, they play an important role within these ecosystems. Therefore, I believe we need to look at what kind of protections can be offered to sharks and therefore to the overall health of an aquatic environment. Allowing shark finning to continue simply disrupts these kinds of practices, and looking at how this legislation can help the practice of shark finning while maintaining a healthy aquatic and marine environment is very important.

We have heard about the number of shark species that are perilously close to extinction or that are endangered or approaching that status in Canada and internationally. This should be an issue of concern to all Canadians and to all persons around the globe. Canada has a real opportunity here to play a leadership role in finding the right legislative balance so that harvesting can happen humanely and in a way that is not disruptive to the marine environment.

We have received some petitions. In my riding of Cloverdale—Langley City, a number of constituents have gotten hold of me. They were surprised that the practice of shark finning is still happening, not only in Canada but internationally. As I said, although there have been measures in place since 1994 for shark finning to be prohibited, we know that there are still occurrences, and Canada can play a leadership role in making sure that we see an end to this kind of practice internationally through best practices.

This idea of taking sharks and cutting off the fins and discarding the carcass is wasteful. Some of the proposed changes of making sure that the entire carcass, when caught, is kept on board and brought to Canada for processing would ensure that the inhumane treatment in how sharks are harvested would be dealt with.

• (1920)

It would also allow us to look at other by-products that come from this harvesting practice. We would not tolerate it with other fish species and I do not see why we would continue to allow this to happen with sharks. Although they have been somewhat demonized, it is time to get past that and look at how we can really deal with them in a humane environment.

We have also heard that it is a commodity and shark fins are retailing for up to \$400 per kilogram. There is an economic piece here and what we are really looking at is how this can be done in a way that is respectful to the environment and allows the humane harvest of sharks to happen. We have heard and seen that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans now requires that fleets land pelagic sharks with their fins naturally attached. This is a huge step forward.

However, that is not a legislative piece, so having Bill S-238 attempt to deal with this and to formalize it in a legislative manner with penalties that would go along with not respecting the law is a responsible way to go. Again, I commend the other House for

identifying this issue and putting forward some very realistic solutions. As we move through the debate process, I will be in support of the legislation being sent to committee.

We have heard in the House many times recently about how our government supports the independent work of committees. I know that the fisheries and oceans committee, if that is where it lands, would be able to do some real digging into this to see how Canadian legislation could deal with this global issue that we are facing. It would be a really wise way to go.

Going back to the bill, I understand that it would prohibit the import and export of shark fins that are not attached to a shark carcass, or any derivatives of shark fins. From the petitions I was talking about that I have seen in my riding of Cloverdale—Langley City, this would really resonate with the constituents I represent in the House. We want shark finning and the illegal shark trade ended so that we can stop the devastating impacts it has on shark populations.

It is unfortunate to see that fisher people see it as being more efficient to harvest the fins and discard the carcass at sea, because there is this very high value of fins that I mentioned of \$400 per kilogram. If they had to take the whole carcass, that creates, perhaps, a financial burden by making it less profitable, but we really feel that we need to see this practice dealt with. As I said, I commend both the other place and this House for bringing forward the legislation.

In Canada, we have heard that we comprise less than 1.5% of global shark fin imports, so there is always a question domestically about how much time and effort we should spend dealing with issues that are of global importance. In this case, 98.5% of the issue is actually being dealt with outside of Canada's shores and waters. We can look at examples of countries such as Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States, which have all dealt with this issue in different ways. Canada has an opportunity to be part of this global solution and continue to provide global leadership.

It is important for us to have this discussion right now. It is going to be timely for us to get the legislation to committee, have the committee look at it and report back to the House to see what kinds of amendments could be proposed to strengthen Bill S-238, because it really is a step in the right direction.

With that, I will close my comments and I am thankful for the opportunity to speak to a very important piece of legislation.

• (1925)

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. member for Avalon, I will let him know there are only about six minutes or so remaining in the time for Private Members' Business. I will give him the usual signal and he will have his remaining time when the House next takes up debate on this question at a later date.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Avalon.

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity today to speak on Bill S-238, an act to amend the Fisheries Act and the Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act (importation and exportation of shark fins).

I want to join colleagues who spoke earlier and thank Senator Michael MacDonald for sponsoring the bill in the Senate and my colleague across the way from Port Moody—Coquitlam for sponsoring it here in this House.

When we think about how cruel it would be to an animal to remove a vital part, such as the fin from a fish, whether it be a shark, whale or any species in the water, it is unimaginable. Can members imagine people harvesting the dorsal fin of an orca, for example, and it not being able to survive in the water once it was put back in? What an act of cruelty it would be to capture the animal, remove the fin and discard it back into the water to perish in a horrible death because it is not able to function as it was designed to.

To mention what the bill is about, it states:

Whereas in 1994 the Canadian Government banned shark finning — namely, the practice of removing the fins from live sharks and discarding the remainder of the sharks while at sea — in Canadian fisheries waters and with respect to Canadian licensed vessels fishing outside of Canada's exclusive economic zone;

Whereas Canadians are increasingly aware of the devastating effect of the continuing practice of shark finning and the resulting decline in shark species in Canadian waters and around the world, and are in support of measures to stop this practice and ensure the responsible conservation, management and exploitation of sharks;

And whereas the importation of shark fins is not justifiable in the face of the dramatic decline in shark species and losses in shark populations worldwide;

Most people may not know this, but being from Newfoundland and Labrador, I grew up on the ocean. I still live within a few hundred feet of the ocean. We have seen an increase in the sightings of sharks in our waters around Newfoundland and Labrador, especially during the summer months. Different species of sharks seem to populate our waters. It may be because of the good feeding on the fish that also populate our waters. However, a lot of people say that it is global warming or the warming of the waters in the area in which we live that is attracting the sharks to more or less migrate to different areas and hunt for food, as of course is their natural instinct.

I believe that this government will support this bill in the House and get it to committee. I look forward to that, because I believe it will come to the committee that I chair, the fisheries and oceans committee, and give us a chance to bring witnesses forward to hear from people involved in the industry, to hear from people on all sides, and get the proper consultations done. If we have to make the necessary amendments, we can get that done, while keeping in mind the purpose of the bill, which is to do away with this horrible act of shark finning being done on a commercial basis.

I believe somebody may have mentioned it, and if not, I saw see it in print, that shark fins can be sold for a value of up to \$400 per kilogram. That is a nice payday for people who can get two or three shark fins a day. However, they are not looking at what they are destroying or considering the cruelty inflicted on the animal.

Our government agrees that shark finning is a destructive and wasteful practice that contributes to the global decline of several shark species. That is why shark finning has been prohibited in Canada for over two decades. That is why our government implemented measures that require all sharks caught in Canadian fisheries to be landed with their fins naturally attached.

Adjournment Proceedings

I think my time is up. Once again, I am thankful for the opportunity to give my short intervention today.

● (1930)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Avalon will have five minutes remaining in his time when the House next gets back to debate on the question.

[*Translation*]

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

CANADA POST CORPORATION

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise once again to recall some of the events of last fall concerning the strike by Canada's postal workers.

I am sure there are a number of members on the government benches who would be happy to forget about those events and what the strike meant for workers' rights in Canada, but we here have not forgotten. In particular, I am following up on a question that had to do with the suspension of short-term disability benefits for Canada Post workers while the rotating strike was happening.

We have had a number of exchanges in the House before, including in late shows like this one, and the government has been very unapologetic for the fact that Canada Post workers who were on short-term disability had their benefits cut off when the postal workers went out—and not for a full strike, but for a rotating strike. Those workers who were receiving short-term disability benefits did not get a rotating termination to their short-term disability benefits: They were off that benefit for the entire time.

What seems to be the subject of some dispute is the role of the government in causing that suspension of benefits to occur for those people who were already vulnerable, who were already living on a reduced income and who did not have a way to make up that income.

I would draw the attention of the House to subsection 22(1) of the Canada Post Corporation Act, which says that “In the exercise of its powers and the performance of its duties, the Corporation shall comply with such directives as the Minister may give to it.”

This establishes a very clear legal authority for the minister responsible for Canada Post to tell Canada Post management that they have the option of suspending those short-term disability benefits but that the minister thinks it is wrong, that they should not do it, and is directing them not to do it and to continue making those payments as if the collective agreement were in force.

Adjournment Proceedings

Therefore, notwithstanding whatever was happening or not happening at the bargaining table and with the strike, what I am zeroing in on today is that I and many people across the country believe that it was a wrong and mean-spirited decision by Canada Post management to suspend those short-term disability benefit payments and that the government was at the very least complicit in that decision in not exercising its authority under the Canada Post Corporation Act to tell management to cut it out.

I would like somebody from the government side to stand tonight and explain to those workers why it was that the government was willing to stand idly by while they were not getting paid their short-term disability insurance when their co-workers were out on a rotating strike. For virtually every day on that strike, the mail got delivered in most parts of Canada. There were some service interruptions, but these people lost their benefit full time, all the time, while the rotating strike was occurring.

Why was the government content to stand by and let that happen?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleague and I can certainly agree on the fact that in the best-case scenario both sides are able to sit down at the bargaining table and come out with an agreement that is of benefit to all. Unfortunately, there are instances that arise where such is not the case and an agreement is elusive. That is when governments have to take action.

As we have previously said, back-to-work legislation is a last resort solution. It is something that this government certainly did not take lightly. We did everything we could to support and encourage Canada Post and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers to reach that negotiated collective agreement. Throughout the process, which was going on for well over a year, the parties were assisted by federal conciliation officers, mediators and a special mediator. Alas, despite these efforts, the parties were unable to reach a new agreement.

As a last resort, the government tabled Bill C-89 in November 22 of last year. This set out the process by which the parties were required to work with an independent mediator-arbitrator and the employees would return to work. On November 26, Bill C-89 received royal assent, the rotating strikes ended and all postal services resumed on November 27.

Since Canada Post and CUPW were unable to agree on a mediator-arbitrator as per the process outlined in the legislation, our government appointed a former chairperson of the Canadian Industrial Relations Board to serve as the mediator-arbitrator to assist the parties in reaching a new collective agreement.

It seems to me that it is worth noting that the member across has conveniently forgotten about the many changes our government has brought forward for workers because this is about workers. We have passed legislation to modernize federal labour standards in this country, which have not been updated since the 1960s. These changes stem from extensive consultations with stakeholders who have told us the same thing, time and time again: The way Canadians work has changed, but federal labour standards have not.

The modern set of labour standards we have introduced will better protect Canadian workers, especially those who are most vulnerable,

such as workers who are in part-time, temporary or low-wage jobs and it will help set the stage for good-quality jobs. This modern set of standards will also help ensure employees in precarious work are paid, treated fairly and have access to labour standards by introducing equal treatment protections.

These are just some of the measures that we have taken to show respect in our approach to labour as a government and in developing the labour laws that are needed for today's workforce, but also respecting collective bargaining, making sure that Canadian workers are shown respect and that the Government of Canada is there not to put its thumb on the scale.

• (1935)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague will know that we disagree pretty seriously about the way the government chose to handle that particular strike, but my question today is very specific. It has to do with the workers on short-term disability who had their benefits cut off for five weeks without any reprieve, break or anything else.

The fact of the matter is that the government did have the power to intervene to tell Canada Post the truth, which was that this was an underhanded bargaining technique. The government is ultimately responsible for that. That is on the government for not having done anything about it.

We still have not heard a justification for it. We have heard excuses. We have heard diversions, such as, "Well, they could have applied for EI" or "Well, you know, there was a compassionate program where we cut them off their benefits and then let them reapply later and we said yes to some and no to others." None of those answers cut it.

This is another opportunity for somebody from the government to get up and explain why it was that it stood by for five weeks while vulnerable workers did not receive their short-term disability payments. Why was that?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, again, my colleague across started his initial comments saying that the people on the government side would like to forget last fall and the legislation. In fact, there is one thing that I will not forget. It is the sanctimony from the NDP when they stood and fought against it.

It was a last-step solution. However, we know that NDP governments have brought in back-to-work legislation 15 different times. The member for London—Fanshawe, the member for Hamilton Centre and the member for Vancouver East all passed back-to-work legislation.

The one that really gets it for me is back in 1995 during the railway strike. I will read from Hansard, which says, "I want to make it clear that though we object to back to work legislation, we think it should be passed in all stages today. The strike has gone on long enough." That was in response to legislation that came to the House in 1995.

Do members know who said that? It was this member's father. There is a time to bring in back-to-work legislation and Bill Blaikie was a member who I had a huge amount of respect for. He knew it at the time and I would encourage his son to maybe have that conversation.

• (1940)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, home to Garrison Petawawa, training ground of the Warriors, I am honoured to rise in this place on behalf of the women and men who serve in the Canadian Armed Forces. I appreciate the trust I have earned from our women and men in the forces.

During question period, I asked the scandal-ridden government a question regarding the mistreatment of our veterans and the fact that the Prime Minister could find over \$10 million to give to a convicted terrorist. While I may have expected a lack of response from whoever was the minister of veterans affairs at the time of the question, there have been so many, Canadians expect better treatment of their soldiers and their veterans. I implore the latest Minister of Veterans Affairs, who will not be minister for very long, to become an advocate for veterans, which has been lacking in this scandal-ridden government.

My question referred to the decision by the Prime Minister and his party to play politics with military pensions. The policy decision to cut \$8 billion from the defence budget and play partisan politics relates to the fact that the budget has not been increased, as was promised to soldiers and veterans.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer confirms that veterans are paying for this scandal-ridden government's mistakes. Veterans with severe and permanent injuries will be worse off, by an average of \$300,000, with the latest pension shell game. In the last election, the "thank you for your donation" Prime Minister promised our veterans that he would restore lifelong pensions and that veterans would not need to fight the government in court. The Liberal Party broke that promise and has already spent nearly \$40 million, which could have gone to veterans, fighting veterans in court.

The critical injury benefit is another example of the mistreatment of Canadian veterans. While I have raised the case of Afghanistan veteran and retired warrant officer Roger Perreault on more than one occasion, and the shameful treatment of that individual, his cries for help have been met with silence.

In the last year of the Conservative government, 2015, 114 veterans qualified for the critical injury benefit. From December 2018 to date, only four veterans have qualified for the critical injury benefit under the Liberal government.

In the last three years, 55 veterans who suffered a traumatic incident that qualified for the critical injury benefit received a total of \$4 million for their pain and suffering. Compare that treatment of Canadian veterans to how the Liberal Party rewarded convicted terrorist bomb-maker Omar Khadr by giving him \$10.5 million tax-free.

The new veterans charter brought in by the Chrétien government added a detention benefit for soldiers who, while serving in the

forces, were detained by an enemy, opposing force, or person or group carrying out a terrorist activity or who evaded capture or escaped from any power.

I have been contacted by a serving soldier who was detained by Serbian forces for 18 days while serving with the UN in Yugoslavia, back in 1994, with 54 others. I was shocked to find out that the federal government will not consider a claim until a soldier has been a detainee for greater than 30 days. As a consequence of setting such high arbitrary rules to qualify for the detention benefit, this soldier and others in a similar circumstance cannot qualify.

I was shocked, but not surprised, to learn that the Chrétien government refused to recognize the heroism of all but one member of the Royal Canadian Dragoons battle group, which was held hostage and participated in Operation CAVALIER, or CANBAT 2.

Where is the justice in the Liberal government coming up with the arbitrary number of 30 as the cut-off for the detention benefit announced in the new veterans charter? It would appear that this is another example, like the critical injury benefit, of the Liberal government announcing a benefit that excludes soldiers and veterans who should qualify.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to correct any misunderstandings from some members of the House may have regarding benefits for veterans, including the pension for life for members of the Canadian Armed Forces who have been discharged for medical reasons.

Canadians are proud of our brave veterans and we are proud of the investments we have made to improve the benefits available to these veterans. We have done a lot. We promised to restore a monthly pension, and this pension takes effect today, on April 1. The pension for life replaces the previous types of financial support and takes a holistic approach focused on the well-being of veterans who experience a service-related illness or injury.

The first benefit is the pain and suffering compensation, which replaces the lump-sum disability award with a tax-free benefit of \$1,150 per month for life. Veterans can also choose between a monthly benefit or a lump sum benefit. Previously, a lump sum payment was the only choice. In addition, we replaced the career impact allowance, a taxable benefit, with the pain and suffering compensation, which is tax free.

These allowances are for veterans with a permanent severe impairment resulting from service. We listened to them and did something about it, unlike the Conservatives who cut services for veterans for 10 years.

Adjournment Proceedings

We have the income replacement benefit, which provides the equivalent of 90% of a veteran's income during the rehabilitation period. This benefit is also available for survivors and orphans.

Before we launched the pension for life, on April 1, 2018, we introduced a series of new and improved initiatives to better support veterans and their families, including the caregiver recognition benefit, a tax free monthly benefit of \$1,000 paid directly to persons who provide informal care to a veteran who receives a disability award or a pain and suffering compensation.

However, we understand that financial security is just one aspect of well-being. Transitioning from the army to civilian life is a big deal, especially for someone who is demobilized for medical reasons. The suite of programs and services for veterans and their families also seeks to help them transition successfully. Beyond the veterans emergency fund, the programs support physical, professional, and mental rehabilitation and reintegration into a new community.

One important part of a successful transition is finding a new career or new purpose. We also focused our efforts on new careers. Qualified career counsellors are available to help veterans find the career that suits them best. The veteran's partner, spouse or survivor is also eligible for training and career coaching, support for career development, and, in some cases, placement in a position directly related to the veteran. If education or training is needed to help them find a new job, the education and training benefit offers up to \$40,000 for veterans with six years of service and up to \$80,000 for veterans with 12 years of service.

Another important part of a successful transition is finding a place in a new community. By expanding the veteran family program to include medically released veterans and their families, we are helping them find the programs they need while maintaining precious ties to their military community.

We are proud of the improvements we have made to help veterans successfully transition to civilian life after serving in the military.

•(1945)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, since the detention benefit was announced, I can find no record of it ever being paid out or any figures of unsuccessful applications. The government announces programs for veterans and then makes it impossible to qualify. What a cruel trick. Promises to restore the funding after the federal budget is balanced do not count for anything because we all know there is no plan to balance the federal budget. It was just another fake promise from the fake feminist Prime Minister who just was not ready to be prime minister.

It is all about setting priorities. Veterans tell me they are outraged that it was a priority of the government to give over \$10 million to a terrorist but cry poverty when it comes time to pay the benefits that were promised to soldiers and veterans. The health and safety of our women and men in uniform should be a number one priority for the government.

There is an opportunity for the new Minister of Veterans Affairs to make things right. He can either repeat the mistakes of the last

ministers of veterans affairs or do the right thing and give the veterans what was promised in the last election.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have a chance to answer that question.

Once again, my colleagues opposite are fearmongering. Veterans Affairs Canada is absolutely not creating a multi-tiered system. Rather, it strictly adheres to a "one veteran, one standard" model. Benefits are available to all eligible veterans, regardless of the application or number of applications. At the same time, Veterans Affairs Canada treats each veteran as a unique individual. Case managers inform all veterans and their families of the benefits and programs they are entitled to and work with them to come up with a plan that meets their specific needs and aspirations in post-service life. Three years ago we promised to bring back a lifetime monthly pension for veterans with a disability related to their service. We listened to them and we are responding to what we heard. We took the time to get it right. That is why we have invested over \$10 billion in new funding for veterans and their families. Beginning today, April 1, we are delivering on that promise.

•(1950)

FINANCE

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising in the House on April 1, but this is no April Fool's joke. I am here to ask very pertinent questions. What was unfortunate about question period was that the government was just avoiding answering questions. I am here this evening to clear things up.

On January 4, I asked the Prime Minister a question about his budget plan not working. When you incur a debt, you must have a plan to repay it. That is the basis of any economy. As a father, if I decide to borrow some money tomorrow morning and do not have a plan to repay or reduce my debt, at some point I am going to go bankrupt. I hope that this government will not be re-elected so we can protect the Canadian economy. A deficit today means higher taxes tomorrow for us, our children and our grandchildren. We have to have a vision. We cannot take a short-term view of the economy. We have to have plans and structure, and we must plan to balance budget. The Liberals said that. However, what they say and what they do are two entirely different things.

The Prime Minister will have to increase taxes to pay for his irresponsible and out-of-control spending. That is the basis of any economy, as I mentioned earlier. When will the Prime Minister unveil his plan to increase taxes? I asked that question on February 4. The Minister of Finance has tabled another budget since then. This is the fourth year of the Liberals' mandate and they still have not balanced the budget.

Adjournment Proceedings

My question was for the Prime Minister, but the finance minister is the one who responded to it. He told me that the Liberals' plan was very clear, that they had started by cutting taxes for the middle class. All the firms mention that. I have to say that I am not talking about Morneau Shepell, because that firm has already demonstrated that when it comes to professionalism and being an economic authority, it is just borderline. I would like to remind the House that one of the shareholders was the current finance minister, who once said that Stephen Harper made a good decision. It is written in a book. The book says that Stephen Harper's Conservative government made the right decision when it raised the retirement age to 67. It is simple mathematics. It was a difficult decision, but the Conservative government at the time made that decision. The Liberals, however, have not made any decisions.

How are we supposed to believe in this government's plan for the budget and the economy when, in 2015, it promised to balance the budget by 2019? We want to know if the Liberals intend to show Canadians their plan for paying back their debt. Will they tax Canadians more to fill the nation's coffers?

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I could first clarify for all those in the House this evening, there were a couple of misstatements by my colleague.

He talked about the management of the economy. The fact is that this government has created 800,000 new jobs since coming to government in 2015. The fact is that unemployment rates are at record lows. The fact is that the youth unemployment rate is at its lowest level since records have been kept. When we look at under-represented groups in our workforce—women, persons with disabilities and indigenous Canadians—we see that those unemployment numbers are at all-time lows, so we can feel a great deal of pride.

The other thing he mentioned was the fact that we changed the OAS eligibility age back to 65 after the Conservatives had moved it up to 67. That will keep 130,000 Canadians, the most vulnerable Canadians, from the poverty lines. That is what that measure will do.

Since we came to office, the government has invested in the things that matter to Canadians and to middle-class Canadians. One of our first actions was to raise taxes on the wealthiest 1% of Canadians, while over nine million Canadians are benefiting from the middle-class tax cut.

We introduced the Canada child benefit, or CCB. Compared to the system of child benefits that it replaced, the CCB is simpler, more generous and better targeted to those who need it most. Indeed, nine out of 10 families are receiving more in child benefits than they did under the previous Conservative system. As a result, the typical middle-class family of four is receiving about \$2,000 more in support than they did in 2015. This year, on average, families benefiting from the CCB will receive around \$6,800 to help with the high cost of raising children. This benefit amount will continue to rise with the cost of living, as it has been indexed to inflation as of July 2018, two years earlier than promised.

It is worth reminding Canadians that the Conservatives voted against every one of these measures.

We have a plan to invest in and strengthen the middle class and to grow the economy, and the results are certainly beginning to show. There are strong employment gains for women, persons with disabilities and indigenous Canadians. The pace of job gains in these areas has been significant over the last three years.

Building on this momentum, we recently introduced in budget 2019 the next step to this plan. Our debt-to-GDP ratio has continued to come down. We know that in 2009, under the Conservatives, it was up to about 38%; it is back down now to about 31.5%.

We are on the right course. Canadians know that we are on the right course, and they will demonstrate that come October.

• (1955)

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Speaker, the fact that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour is answering my questions is proof that things are out of control in the Liberal camp. When I asked the Prime Minister a question, the Minister of Finance was the one who answered. Does the Minister of Finance not have a parliamentary secretary? One does wonder what is going on.

The parliamentary secretary said that families are getting more money, but it is important to note that they are also paying twice as much tax. The government is giving with one hand and taking back twice as much with the other. Simple math: Canadian families are losing money. According to the Fraser Institute, at least 70% of Canadian families are paying more tax.

I want to close with a few words about the TrudeauMeter. According to the TrudeauMeter, as the government's term draws to a close, 32 of Trudeau's 231 election promises have not yet been started, 57 are in progress, only 40% have been achieved, or rather, postponed, and 44 have been broken. Come October 2019, I hope Canadians will remember the promises this Liberal government has not kept.

[English]

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, if unmitigated gall were a currency here in Canada, I know we would have a lot of Conservatives driving Cadillacs because of what they did with the finances of this country.

When I look at Stephen Harper, I see he added \$150 billion to the national debt. In 2009 it was a record \$55 billion that he added to the national debt. We saw that year over year.

We know that our debt-to-GDP ratio has improved considerably since those Harper years. We will continue on this path to grow the economy and to make sure that young Canadians have the skills that they need to get those jobs and that those job opportunities are there for all Canadians.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (2000)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands

adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 8 p.m.)

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