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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 14, 2019

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 14, 2019

The House met at 10 a.m.

[English]

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[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 13 petitions.

* * *

[Translation]

EXCISE TAX ACT

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-448, An Act to amend the Excise Tax Act (supply of digital content).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce my bill. Just yesterday, my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie and I were in Montreal, where we pledged to introduce a bill to fix a problem with the Excise Tax Act. This is that bill.

Bill C-448 amends the Excise Tax Act to close the loophole that allows Netflix and other digital content distributors not to collect GST even though all other digital content distributors in Canada do. Netflix is the best known of the companies that use this loophole. This bill would also apply to all other foreign digital content distributors that, like Netflix, do not abide by the same tax rules as Canadian companies.

The purpose of the bill is to level the playing field so the same taxation rules apply to everyone. I urge the government to take its cue from this bill and make it its own so we can fix the problem at last.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

PETITIONS

EQUALIZATION

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the residents of my community are tired of their jobs being called “dirty” and they are tired of the punitive policies of the current government, like Bill C-69, the tanker ban, which are designed to shut down the energy sector and prevent people from working.

Therefore, I am pleased to present a petition today on behalf of the residents of my community who are asking the government to review the equalization formula and also issue a report to Canadians on the fairness, effectiveness and outcomes of the equalization program, given the government's extremely punitive policies toward the energy sector. They are tired of this.

EYE HEALTH

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition to the government regarding a national framework for action to promote eye health and vision care. The number of Canadians with vision loss is expected to double in the next 20 years.

The petitioners also indicate that the emerging crisis in eye health and vision care affects everyone in the Canadian population, especially the most vulnerable, who are children, seniors, diabetics and indigenous peoples.

The petitioners also indicate that the underlying issues common to the prevention of all eye disease and vision loss need a multi-stakeholder response.

They are asking the government to support Motion No. 183, calling for the development of a national framework for action to promote eye health and vision care, which would benefit all Canadians through the reduction of vision impairment resulting from preventable conditions and the modification of known risk factors.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table a petition presented by constituents in my riding, related to a ban on cosmetic animal testing. The petitioners note that a ban on cosmetic animal testing would not harm or impact current cosmetics products for sale in Canada, because the European Union, of course, banned it in 2013 and its market continues to grow.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners call for a harmonization of our laws with the European Union's laws, and as well for support for Bill S-214 from the Senate, regarding the ban on the sale and/or manufacture of animal-tested cosmetics in Canada.

MORTGAGES

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition on behalf of 39 of my constituents. It is on the B-20 stress test. They remind the House of Commons that when it was introduced in 2018, it significantly reduced the purchasing power of countless Canadians. A hundred thousand Canadians have failed the stress test, and 50,000 Canadians have been barred from renewing their mortgages. The petitioners also remind the House of Commons that twice at the finance committee there were attempts to have this study and it was voted down by Liberal MPs. They are asking the House of Commons to study the B-20 stress test and do a full review of it.

• (1010)

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition today with signatories from central Ontario, Peterborough, Otonabee and Lakefield, Ontario, who are adding their voices to the thousands of Canadians and organizations representing more than three million Canadians that support and call upon the Government of Canada to support Bill C-331, the international promotion and protection of human rights act, which would create a new civil cause of action that would allow Canadian federal courts to hear and decide claims for violations of international law that occur outside of Canada.

The petitioners believe very strongly in Canada's commitment to human rights, and Canadian companies have been involved in human rights abuses abroad. The petitioners call on the Government of Canada to support my bill, Bill C-331.

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present another petition related to the landfill in Coventry, Vermont, right next to Lake Memphremagog.

Lake Memphremagog supplies drinking water to 175,000 people in the region, including residents of Brome—Missisquoi.

The petitioners are calling on the Minister of Foreign Affairs to immediately ask the International Joint Commission to conduct an environmental impact assessment of the plan to expand the landfill in Coventry, Vermont, by 51 acres.

[English]

VYSHYVANKA DAY

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition calling upon Parliament to designate every third Thursday in May Vyshyvanka Day throughout Canada. Every year, thousands of Ukrainian Canadians celebrate Vyshyvanka Day to show that the embroidered shirt is in their national genetic code, a symbol of the struggle for independence and a symbol of dignity, love and unity. The signatures are from across Canada.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise today to present a petition that deals with a Nova Scotia issue, indicative of a national concern. The petitioners are all from Calgary. The concern is with the kraft pulp mill in Abercrombie, Nova Scotia. The current plan to shut down the atrocity of the poor environmental cleanup over the 50 years of this pulp mill's operation is to run a pipe into the Gulf of St. Lawrence. That is what is being proposed. The petitioners call for the federal government to have a full environmental review of the proposed pipe and the threat that it represents to the fisheries in the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise with a second petition in support of Bill C-331, the international promotion and protection of human rights act. It is a positive bill in that its purpose is for Canada to maintain, promote and enhance its role in the international community as a country committed to upholding human rights and environmental sustainability worldwide. We have not always acted in the best interests of the societies or the environment where we have been involved internationally. This bill provides the opportunity to provide responsible international corporate standards and to allow pursuing legal recourse within Canada to deal with some of these infractions around the world.

The signators and supporters of this petition represent three million Canadians across Canada. They are asking the government to support Bill C-331.

OPIOIDS

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition on behalf of many people from coastal British Columbia. We know that over 10,000 people have died as a result of the preventable opioid crisis from fentanyl-poisoned sources. This petition to address the opioid crisis calls on the government to declare it a public health emergency. As we know, there have been more lives lost to this opioid crisis than there were with SARS, H1N1 and Ebola.

The petitioners are calling on the government to declare the current opioid and fentanyl poisoning crisis a national public health emergency under the Emergencies Act in order to manage and resource it, with the aim of reducing and eliminating preventable deaths, to reform current drug policy to decriminalize personal possession, and to create, with urgency and immediacy, a system to provide safe, unadulterated access to substances so that people who use substances experimentally, recreationally or chronically are not at imminent risk of overdose due to a contaminated source. I hope the government will pay attention to this and take direct action.

Government Orders

•(1015)

DIRECT FLIGHTS TO AMRITSAR

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of my constituents of Brampton North to table a petition asking for the government to proactively advocate on their behalf for a direct flight to Amritsar from Toronto or from Vancouver.

Many Punjabis in Canada, about 1.2 million, travel to India regularly. Currently, there are no direct flights to Amritsar. It is a big inconvenience to them, because the travel time is eight to 12 hours from New Delhi. Many of my constituents are travelling directly to Amritsar.

This is the 550th year of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's birth. A lot of pilgrims will be travelling there.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a second petition on behalf of my constituents, drawing attention to the plight of Christian refugees from Pakistan in Thailand.

None of them are given an opportunity to apply for refugee status under the UNHCR. They are imprisoned. They are not allowed to work or to study.

We believe it is inhumane. The petitioners believe that it is inhumane treatment, and that the Government of Canada should speak with Thailand and the United Nations in order to correct this matter.

The Speaker: I remind hon. colleagues presenting petitions that members should not be presenting their personal views on those petitions when they are doing so.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS*[English]***CANADA–MADAGASCAR TAX CONVENTION
IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2018**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill S-6, An Act to implement the Convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Speaker: There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (for the Minister of Finance) moved that the bill be concurred in.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (for the Minister of Finance) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise in the House to speak to Bill S-6, an act to implement the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation, which is another important step forward in our government's continued commitment to Canadians to strengthen tax fairness.

The measures proposed in this bill strengthen our efforts to build a fair and equitable tax regime that will benefit all Canadians. Bill S-6 is a tax convention that complements other tax treaties we already have with many other international partners.

[Translation]

To ensure that our economy is really working for everyone, we must have a fair tax system, and all Canadians must pay their fair share.

After all, through the taxes we pay as Canadians, we can provide greater support to the middle class, reduce inequality and build modern infrastructure that will get our products to new markets and help create good jobs all across the country.

For nearly four years now, we have been committed to taking action to foster growth and inclusive prosperity, while maintaining fairness for all taxpayers.

A fair tax system is crucial to ensuring that more and more people benefit from a growing economy. When Canadians have more money to invest, save and grow the economy, everyone benefits. Our government began taking steps in that direction from the very beginning.

•(1020)

[English]

In fact, one of our first legislative actions was to raise taxes on the wealthiest Canadians in order to cut taxes for the middle class. Over nine million Canadians are benefiting from our middle-class tax cut. Single individuals who benefit from the middle-class tax cut are saving on average \$330 each year, and couples that benefit are saving an average of \$540 each year.

Government Orders

We also took action to provide simpler, more generous and better targeted support to those Canadian families that needed it the most. We did so in 2016 by replacing the old child benefit system with the Canada child benefit. Across Canada, the CCB payments are worth about \$24 billion and benefit 3.4 million Canadian families every year. As a result of the Canada child benefit, nine out of 10 Canadian families are better off. I am very proud to mention to the House that the Canada child benefit has helped lift over 300,000 kids out of poverty.

To ensure that the Canada child benefit continues to play a vital role in helping Canadian families, our government strengthened the benefit by indexing it to the cost of living, as of July 2018, which is two full years ahead of schedule.

Thanks to the middle-class tax cut and the CCB, a typical middle-class family of four receives on average about \$2,000 more each year to help with the costs of raising their children, which is \$2,000 more than they received in 2015. Those numbers are not according to me, they are according to the OECD, which published a study last summer, highlighting how big a difference those two measures had made in the lives of so many Canadian families.

[Translation]

We are not stopping there. Small businesses are one of the key drivers of the Canadian economy. They represent 70% of all private sector jobs, and that is why our government also lowered the small business tax rate. We did that because, when small businesses succeed, all of Canada benefits. We lowered the small business tax rate not once, but twice. As members know, we first lowered it from 10.5% to 10% in 2018 and then we lowered it to 9% in January of this year. For a medium-sized SME, that represents an additional \$1,600 a year compared to 2017. That money can be used to create jobs, invest and buy new equipment. With those two consecutive reductions in the small business tax rate, the combined federal-provincial-territorial average tax rate for SMEs is now 12.2%. That is by far the lowest in the G7 and the fourth-lowest among the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, or OECD, countries.

Thanks to these measures that have helped boost Canadians' confidence and stimulate economic growth, over a million jobs have been created in Canada since 2015. These new jobs brought Canada's unemployment rate down to the lowest it has been in 40 years and fostered economic growth, making Canada one of the strongest economies in the G7. Our goal is to maintain that growth in the long term.

[English]

Our long-term plan is working, and Canadians can feel confident their government is working hard to ensure they can keep more of their hard-earned dollars.

Tax fairness is an important step in this process. Tax fairness has been, and will continue to be, a cornerstone of the government's promise to Canadians to strengthen and grow the middle class and grow the economy now and over the long term. In each of our budgets, we have taken legislative action on both international and domestic fronts to enhance the integrity of Canada's tax system and

give Canadians greater confidence that the system is fair for everyone.

[Translation]

Our government has also boosted the capacity of the Canada Revenue Agency, or the CRA, to crack down on tax fraud and tax avoidance. Investments made over the past two years have enabled the CRA to better target persons who pose the highest risk of tax avoidance and evasion. The CRA now has better access to information on Canadians' overseas bank accounts as we have put in place the common reporting standard. With this new system, Canada and more than 100 other countries now exchange financial account information to help us identify when Canadians are avoiding taxes by hiding money in offshore accounts.

The CRA needs other types of information from foreign countries to ensure that all taxpayers pay their fair share of taxes. That is why the tax convention to be implemented by Bill S-6 establishes a system for the exchange of tax information between Canada and Madagascar. Our efforts have focused mainly on fighting tax evasion and fraud because these practices result in heavy financial losses for the government and, by extension, for all Canadian taxpayers.

• (1025)

[English]

Recently, we passed important legislation through the House to introduce a multilateral convention to allow Canada and many of its treaty partners to implement tax treaty-related measures to counter a practice known as base erosion and profit shifting, BEPS. BEPS refers to the international planning used by some corporations and wealthy individuals to inappropriately avoid paying taxes by shifting profits earned in Canada to other offshore jurisdictions.

Just last month, budget 2019 proposed to invest an additional \$150 million over five years, starting in 2019-20, to step up our efforts on tax evasion. This new investment would allow the CRA to fund new initiatives and extend existing programs. This includes taking action to enhance tax compliance in the real estate sector by investing in the creation of four new dedicated real estate audit teams at the CRA that focus on high-risk areas, notably in Vancouver and Toronto.

Budget 2019 also takes action so the CRA can stay ahead of non-compliance schemes driven by the use of new advanced technologies. Budget 2019 proposes to invest \$65.8 million over five years to improve the CRA's information technology system. This would replace legacy systems and modernize the infrastructure used to fight tax evasion.

[Translation]

A modern tax system will help provide more opportunities to Canadians. It will also help create a trading environment in which business owners and entrepreneurs will have the means to invest. They will be able to develop their businesses and create more well-paying jobs for the middle class. That is why, in a world of challenges and constant change, it is so important for Canada to continue developing and updating its network of tax treaties.

The bill we are looking at is part of those efforts. Because Canada is and always will be a trading nation, our tax system has to be designed in such a way to help Canadians seize the incredible opportunities that international trade and investment have to offer. Tax treaties with our trading partners are absolutely fundamental to creating those opportunities.

Canada's 93 tax treaties make up one of the broadest networks in the world. The tax treaty being considered with Madagascar in Bill S-6 is part of our countless efforts to strengthen Canada's ties and international co-operation.

[*English*]

Canada and Madagascar have had diplomatic relations since 1965 and share a common French-language heritage. Both Canada and Madagascar are members of the International Organisation of La Francophonie.

Enhancing our competitiveness depends on opening up more markets and ensuring those markets are available to Canadian businesses. Tax treaties provide the certainty needed to support trade and investment between two countries. They also permit the exchange of information needed to help prevent international tax evasion.

Bilateral double tax conventions are used to eliminate tax barriers to trade and investment between two countries. They achieve this in a number of ways.

Tax treaties also provide a mechanism for jurisdictions to resolve tax disputes. The Canada-Madagascar tax convention will promote certainty, stability and a better business climate for taxpayers and businesses in both Canada and Madagascar.

These are all important goals.

[*Translation*]

In closing, four years ago, we committed to investing in growth while maintaining tax fairness for all taxpayers. A fair tax system is essential to giving as many people as possible the opportunity to reap the benefits of economic growth.

As I said, tax fairness has been and will continue to be a cornerstone of our efforts ensure that Canadian prosperity is inclusive.

We are working with international partners and we are investing to give the Canada Revenue Agency the tools it needs to do its work and ensure that everyone pays their fair share.

We will also ensure that the government continues to provide programs that help all Canadians and that Canada remains positioned as an attractive country for those seeking to work, to invest and to do business.

The benefits of Bill S-6 are clear. The tax convention between Canada and Madagascar will promote fiscal certainty and a better business climate for taxpayers and businesses in both Canada and Madagascar. Furthermore, the convention will help solidify Canada's position in a world that thrives on competition to attract foreign business and investments. By increasing its number of convention partners, our government is helping to create the ideal conditions for

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the long-term economic growth needed to strengthen the middle class.

● (1030)

[*English*]

Our government is committed to growing the economy by helping all Canadians. We maintain that a strong economy is a result of a strong middle class, and our policies and our results reflect this.

Over the past three years, the government has invested in Canadians and in the things that matter most to them and we will continue to do so. Bill S-6 is part of that plan for inclusive and long-term prosperity in this country.

I urge all hon. members to vote yes on this important legislation.

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, near the beginning of the member's speech he talked about the child tax benefit. The Conservatives brought this in initially, making funds available to parents to use in the way they felt was best for their children. However, I am having trouble squaring his comments.

I am aware of one example of a family of five living above the poverty line, but definitely not within that middle-class framework. It also has a child with special needs. The family's total funding, including that CDB within their child tax credit, is barely over the \$1,000 mark.

I would appreciate it if the member would repeat exactly what he said in regard to the average for a family of four.

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Speaker, I would be happy to provide the member with the OECD study conducted last summer. It clearly affirms that when we take into account the Canada child benefit and the middle-class tax cut, a typical average family of four with two children is \$2,000 better off at the end of the year than they were in 2015 for various reasons.

Notably, with the Canada child benefit, we have made it a lot more progressive than it used to be under the Conservatives' scheme, where cheques would be sent to families of millionaires that did not necessarily need it as much as lower-income Canadian families. We decided to send more to families that needed it most and we stopped sending cheques to families of millionaires.

As a result, and it has been largely confirmed by academia and by Statistics Canada, we have reduced poverty considerably in the last three years. In fact, Statistics Canada published a report in the last month, saying that Canada had reduced poverty by 20% in three years and child poverty by 40%. That is so much more than the Conservatives were ever able to achieve in the decade they were in power. Why? Because reducing inequalities was never a priority for their government.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, we are supporting Bill S-6 because Madagascar is not a tax haven. As well, a double taxation avoidance agreement means that companies have to pay their fair share of taxes either in Canada or Madagascar.

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Unfortunately and tragically, the government's record has been absolutely deplorable. In the one case, the Liberals are presenting one bill that may help in one jurisdiction. At the same time, they have been multiplying their efforts to make special arrangements with overseas tax havens. It is even worse than the Conservatives. They picked the Conservatives as their example, but when we look at the Cook Islands, Antigua and Barbuda, and Grenada, notorious tax havens, what the government has done is set up special arrangements so companies can get off scot-free in paying their fair share of taxes.

How does this look to a single mother who is working full-time and paying her fair share of taxes? The government is allowing the corporate sector to get off scot-free and, at the same time, it is multiplying the number of arrangements with tax havens, refusing to allow some of the largest corporations on the planet, the web giants, to pay their fair share of taxes. As we have seen now in special reports that have come out in the last week, an acceleration of money laundering in our country is up to \$50 billion annually. The government's record is deplorable.

Could the member comment on why the government has been so bad at tackling tax evasion?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Speaker, I want to start by thanking the NDP for supporting Bill S-6. I think that shows how important this bill is for preventing double taxation and giving the Canada Revenue Agency the tools it needs to obtain information from foreign countries so it can better fight tax evasion and tax avoidance.

That being said, I would answer that, on the contrary, our approach is vastly different from that of the previous government. Just think of the measures this government has taken regarding beneficial ownership and the multilateral instrument, the work we are doing with OECD countries, the BEPS initiative that Canada is actively involved in, and the resources we have provided to the CRA to enforce our laws and go after tax cheats and anyone who attempts to avoid paying their fair share of taxes. I should also point out that the former Conservative minister, Mr. Blackburn, said that tax evasion was not a priority for them.

We have invested over \$1 billion in the CRA to make sure it has the resources it needs. Of course, this work cannot be done unilaterally. It requires concerted action with our international allies, with the OECD. It will not happen overnight, but the initiatives are in place. We would have liked to see more support from the NDP for our fiscal reform to increase fairness.

• (1035)

[English]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to follow up on the question my colleague just asked the parliamentary secretary. If we are creating these taxation agreements with other countries, would it not be simple to put a section into these agreements that links the agreement?

We all want to avoid double taxation, and we all want to be fair in that sense, but we want to stop this tax evasion. Therefore, would it

not be simple to put a section in there that links the tax record of the other jurisdiction with Canada's? That way, we would not get countries that have a 1% tax rate allowing companies to avoid taxes by putting all of their investments in those countries instead of in Canada, where we would get the taxes from them.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Speaker, if I understand my opposition colleague's question correctly, he was talking about the importance of a good information sharing arrangement. That is the purpose of Bill S-6. That is also what we are trying to do with OECD member countries so we can really tackle tax evasion.

The NDP has had very little to say about one of the key elements. Let us not forget that the NDP wanted to run a Stephen Harper-style campaign on budget cuts and austerity. We are giving the Canada Revenue Agency the resources to do its job. That is important too.

Laws are one thing, but making sure the resources are available to enforce those laws is another. Our investments in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 gave the Canada Revenue Agency the resources to catch people who think they can get away with not paying their fair share of taxes in Canada.

As I said, that has always been a priority for our government, starting back when we raised taxes on the wealthiest 1% so we could cut taxes for the middle class. We are staying the course by giving the Canada Revenue Agency the resources to go after would-be tax cheats.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there has been a great deal of effort by this government to talk about tax agreements and to deal with trade agreements and their impact on Canada's middle class, which has been overwhelmingly positive. I wonder if the member could provide his thoughts regarding the international approach we have taken as a government with moving forward on things such as tax treaties and trade agreements.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Madam Speaker, that is a very important question. Our world is so interconnected that the simple solutions that some are presenting, which involve Canada acting unilaterally and ignoring our trade partners, are rarely as straightforward as they seem.

Obviously, we need to work with our partners to come up with collaborative approaches to tax treaties, just as we do when it comes to trade. The trade agreements that were signed are another issue, I know, but they have helped and continue to help many Canadian businesses to develop, prosper and grow. A number of examples come to mind. For instance, under CETA, some businesses saw their sales explode overnight because they had access to the European market.

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While I am on my feet, I would like to commend the efforts of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and all members of the House who took the time to speak to European parliamentarians to get this agreement in place. Canada is now the only G7 country that has trade agreements with every other G7 country. Access to those markets is an incredible advantage that helps Canadian businesses succeed.

The goal of our government's ongoing efforts is to increase prosperity. However, as I mentioned in my speech, unlike the Conservatives, we feel that, in order to be sustainable, all prosperity must be inclusive.

● (1040)

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am glad to be joining this debate on the most exciting of subjects, tax and a tax treaty. For those constituents of ours who are tuning in on CPAC this early morning, or who have come to watch in the gallery, this is as exciting as this place is going to get, I think, until question period. I see the parliamentary secretary nodding his head, because he knows this too.

I am also glad his intervention covered so much subject matter beyond Bill S-6, because that now allows me to delve into the government's record on taxes, its management of different public policy issues like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, consumer confidence in Canada and business confidence in Canada, as well as how the government has approached Bill S-6.

I will start with an observation about this tax treaty and some of the comments made by the parliamentary secretary. He seemed to be placing Bill S-6 within the confines of trying to achieve greater tax fairness and doing other great things with the Government of Madagascar. He said the bill would make sure that Canadian companies and Canadian taxpayers who may be doing business in Madagascar would not be double taxed, and that it would increase trade and do all of these wonderful things.

However, when I asked officials a question at the Standing Committee on Finance, we heard there was such a small number of tax filers with tax filings in Madagascar that each instance raises confidentiality concerns. Officials from Finance Canada responded to me that these concerns are such that, "consistent with the taxpayer confidentiality protections in the Income Tax Act, the department is precluded from releasing these data".

This may be why Bill S-6 comes from the other place, the Senate side. The department told me in this official letter to the Standing Committee on Finance that there are so few tax filers impacted by this that the department would not be able to release the data. I had asked which sectors of the Canadian economy and which sectors of the Madagascar economy would be affected, and whether there were any good examples. I did a quick Google and DuckDuckGo search, and I was able to find that Sherritt International was one of the companies in question. It is mostly a mining consortium. There was very little else that I could find.

To the credit of the Department of Finance, it did a pretty thorough review. It reviewed sources including the T1134 information return on foreign affiliates of Canadian taxpayers, the T1135 information return that collects data on specified foreign property

holdings, the T106 information return on non-arm's length transactions with related non-residents, and Schedule 21 to the T2 corporate tax return on foreign income tax credits. The department examined all of the years to 2011 and then the subsequent years.

For those still able to follow, either in the public gallery or at home, Finance Canada did a thorough search to double-check how many of these filings would include Madagascar in some way, and they are actually very, very few. Perhaps the tax treaty will enable more business to be conducted by Canadians in that particular country, and there are opportunities yet to be found for this tax treaty and the consolidation of some of the rules to make it simpler for individuals to do business in both. I was unable to find an instance through any international organization or online that showed that Madagascar was behaving like a tax haven. I think that assuages some of the concerns individuals may have had.

I am sure the government knows that I will be supporting this piece of legislation as well. There was no concern about curbing tax evasion through Bill S-6, or about a potential increase in tax evasion. In fact, this is a very small piece of legislation that does not do what the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance said. It is not part of a broader approach. If there are so few tax filers that the information cannot be released, then the impact is negligible. Therefore, it cannot be counted as part of the government's broader plan.

I am pouring out my heart here on what I believe about Bill S-6 and its contents, having spent several meetings at committee looking at this particular piece of legislation. I am feeling lighter. As the Yiddish proverb goes, when one pours out one's heart, one feels lighter, so now that the parliamentary secretary has poured out his heart about the government and what he believes its achievements are, I am going to do the opposite. I am going to poke holes in a couple of things he said. I am going to poke holes in some of the Liberal government's achievements, including in some of the statistics it likes to use.

● (1045)

At committee we asked both Global Affairs and Finance Canada for information on the specifics of Bill S-6 and who it would impact. We were told the bill would impact the mining sector. We were also told that detailed information could not be released because it would compromise the privacy of certain tax filers.

Government Orders

That is unusual. In prior cases, when we have done these tax consolidation treaties or signed up to multilateral international instruments with respect to taxes, such as Bill C-82, which was the tax treaty of tax treaties, it was always tens or hundreds of thousands of Canadians who would be impacted. That included Canadian-controlled private corporations in Canada. There would be many of them, so it was easier for us to estimate the impact.

The parliamentary secretary mentioned base erosion and profit sharing, which is not a fixed section in this particular piece of legislation. We have already had legislation to cover that off.

When I mentioned to my kids, who are very young, with my oldest being 10, that I debated an obscure bill called the Canada-Madagascar tax treaty, the first thing they wanted to talk about was King Julien and Skipper, Kowalski, Rico and Private, the famed characters from *Penguins of Madagascar* and the other movies in the *Madagascar* series. My kids were thrilled to watch that series when they were younger, and they are still thrilled to watch it today.

However, this piece of legislation is not about that. I am sorry to burst their bubble but this, unfortunately, is not about King Julien or those four little penguins.

The parliamentary secretary went off on a tangent at one point. He mentioned that the tax treaty in Bill S-6 would increase consumer confidence, and that it was part of a slew of policy decisions the government has been making to increase both consumer and business confidence. If he had bothered to check the latest statistics posted by different economic analysis bodies online, or if he had bothered to check the Conference Board of Canada, he would have seen that consumer confidence is just as low as it was in 2015. It has not improved since then. We can see that in our communities. I can see it in cities and towns all over Alberta.

However, there is more consumer confidence in Alberta now that we have Premier Jason Kenney and the United Conservative Party in charge. A new cabinet has been sworn in, and on Tuesday of next week the members of the legislative assembly will be sworn in. I hope we will know the new plan for the province on Wednesday.

Some of that plan has already come out. The government of Alberta has already announced that it will get rid of the punishing provincial NDP carbon tax, which was far more punishing on Albertans and Alberta businesses than the federal backstop. That does not mean the backstop is any good. It does not mean the federal carbon tax is any better.

The Alberta government is basically proposing to return to the old system, which was working. It was the first system to put a price on carbon for the largest emitters, not directly on consumers. The system worked. It was lauded all across North America at the time. It did not punish consumers directly for their behaviour, but was specifically aimed at the largest emitters, who were making it part of their business plans. That is the difference. May 31 is the last day of the Alberta carbon tax.

We can really see consumer confidence returning in Alberta. People are more confident now that they have a government that is on their side and will back up the decisions of private businesses, everyday Albertans, the mom-and-pop convenience stores, the local

dry cleaner and the small oil and gas servicing company that has somehow managed to just get by over the last few years.

Albertans are on the cusp. They know that prosperity might return with the right decisions being made by their government to get involved, not to make decisions for them but to support them in the decisions that will create new jobs, create more business investment and lead to higher returns in terms of corporate and personal income taxes.

That is how consumer confidence returns, not by having what we have seen from the federal Liberal government over the past four years. The Liberals created a situation here in Canada that made it impossible to build a pipeline. Energy east was cancelled because of regulatory red tape. Northern gateway was cancelled by cabinet order. There already is a functioning Trans Mountain pipeline, but the Liberals caused a situation in which Kinder Morgan saw no real means to get the expansion built. It was losing construction seasons to it, so the government expropriated it. The government bought it for \$4.5 billion.

● (1050)

Now we know from the Parliamentary Budget Officer that the government not only overpaid for the pipeline project by \$1 billion but will also need to extract another \$8 billion to \$9 billion from the taxpayer to build this pipeline.

There has been talk of legislation and there has been talk of an expedited process, but we are waiting until later in June to find out whether this pipeline will get perhaps half a construction season. We know that construction seasons in Canada are short. Basically, there is a construction season and then there is winter. These are essentially the two seasons we have in Canada. Most people who live in big cities know this, as they have experienced it. We are going to lose a second construction season, and this does nothing but reduce business confidence and reduce consumer confidence.

How can Canadians have faith in a government that purchases a pipeline, overpays for it, and loses money every single month operating it? When the interest being paid on the debt is subtracted from the tolls charged on the pipeline, Liberals are losing money every single month operating in the most profitable part of the energy sector, which is shipping.

I hear constantly from the Minister of Natural Resources, who is from Edmonton and should know better, as once the oil gets to the west coast, 99.95% of the product shipped out of the port of Vancouver goes to California. Those are not my statistics; I am not making them up. I asked the Library of Parliament to confirm them for me. This is from the Greater Vancouver Board of Trade. The port itself has said that 99.95% of the product goes to California to feed the refineries there.

Government Orders

Therefore, this is not about reaching new markets on the current pipeline, and perhaps not even on the future pipeline. A series of public policy decisions led to a situation such that a private company felt unable to build a pipeline because of obstruction at the federal and provincial levels. Those obstructions are not gone; they have just become purely governmental. All the decision-making is on the government side.

When I knocked on doors in my communities and for my provincial counterparts, which I did during this past election in Alberta, I heard time and time again that people have no faith whatsoever in the Liberal government's ability to deliver on the construction of a pipeline and no faith in the government's ability to manage public finances.

The parliamentary secretary mentioned the Liberals' great plan to increase affordability for the middle class and that Liberals reduced the tax bracket from 22% to 20.5%. I remind the parliamentary secretary and all members of the House that the biggest tax break from those tax changes went to every single member of Parliament in this chamber. Those who were earning \$45,000 or less got zero. They received no benefit whatsoever from that tax cut, but because of the way the progressive tax system works, every single member of Parliament in this chamber got over \$800 off their taxes at the end of the day.

That is what the Liberal government did. Those of us in this chamber are not the middle class, but the Liberals did this and claimed it was for the benefit of the middle class. They gave themselves a bigger tax cut than they gave not so much to the working poor, but to people trying to get by and get ahead, people who are taking jobs that many people do not want to take. They work hard for the wages and salaries they earn.

Instead, they received higher payroll taxes. There has been a CPP increase as well, which is taking away from their income at the end of the day and taking away their ability to choose how they want to save.

The second part is that they have a carbon tax to pay. We heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance speak to this, and in the scenarios he noted, he gave OECD numbers. A colleague of mine mentioned that a family on the lower income scale with two kids would not be getting back all of that money. The parliamentary secretary's numbers only make sense if we include the child benefit, which is just a re-badging of the old universal child care benefit. It is the original Conservative policy that was introduced when the government wanted to introduce a universal, one-size-fits-all, cradle-to-old-age welfare system. Whereas the government would take care of our children directly under this system, the UCCB was meant to empower parents, and that is how we should be looking at it.

The government claims that if we look at all government policy together, the carbon tax is not so bad. However, that does not help the kind of family my colleague mentioned, which is not seeing these rebates.

• (1055)

As well, if we look more closely at the GGPPA, which is the acronym for the government's carbon tax bill that is over 200 pages long, and then if we look at this latest budget document and some of

the implementation portions of it, including the algebra formula that implements the rebate program for the federal carbon tax, we see that there is a provision that would allow the minister of finance to exclude any money he or she wishes from the rebate. A finance minister could give it to any other minister he or she wants, for any program, infrastructure or purpose. It is right there in the formula. There is no guarantee in the legislation that Canadians would receive any sort of rebate on the carbon tax, and it will never replace the full amount.

It is absolutely illogical and irrational to say that 100% of the collected tax will be returned to those who pay it. There always is and there always will be an administrative cost in collecting a tax, unless people think that public servants work for free and they think the lights and the heating in this place come for free, and they do not. It has to cost a certain amount of money, which is why we say the government is misleading them. The way the government presents the facts around the carbon rebate and the carbon tax is ingenious, but it is not an environmental plan; it is a tax plan. It is as simple as that.

To return to the point of consumer confidence and how we have not seen it return, some of the facts on LNG speak for themselves. In the case of LNG, \$78 billion worth of projects in Canada have been cancelled since 2015. Those are LNG projects that have been completely abandoned by the companies that were proposing them. Tens of thousands of potential well-paying construction jobs, many of them unionized, are gone. They will not be created, because that \$78 billion to put people to work has been removed from the private sector. That is an important fact to remember.

The only large-scale project that I am aware of that is going ahead is LNG Canada's project. LNG Canada is a consortium. Mitsubishi is involved and Petronas is involved. The only reason that the consortium went ahead with the project is that it has an exclusion and an exemption from the carbon tax. Of course a company will go ahead and build a large-scale industrial project, as LNG Canada is proposing to do, when it gets an exemption to a tax.

I cannot imagine any regular, everyday, hard-working taxpayers being told by the Liberal government that CRA is going to give them an exemption this year so that they do not have to pay taxes because they are doing so well in producing jobs and growing their business or are earning a higher salary because they work hard. Nobody gets that type of exclusion or exemption.

I will spend my last two minutes on my favourite subject, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, because Madagascar, this country that we are signing a tax treaty with, is a member of this bank. As I said, the parliamentary secretary, by going on a tangent, has allowed me to go on a tangent here. Madagascar is a member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. As far as I know, it has not received any project yet. It has only spent \$15 million to \$20 million, which is a paltry sum compared to the nearly half a billion dollars that Canada has set aside. That same money is being used to build pipelines all over Asia, including in Azerbaijan, Bangladesh and the suburbs of Beijing.

Government Orders

I am pouring my heart out here. As my Yiddish proverb said, I am feeling lighter from being able to speak about the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. If we in Canada are unable to build pipelines, which are the safest way to move energy, it seems absolutely wrong to be giving a half a billion dollars to governments in Asia and to the China-controlled, Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

I support Bill S-6, a small piece of legislation coming to us from the Senate, but I do not support the government's agenda and its repeated failures to get large-scale energy infrastructure built in Canada. I do not support the government's policies that have undermined business confidence and the confidence of Canadians. October cannot come soon enough. The current Liberal government is not as advertised.

• (1100)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there are many things that the member opposite has put on the record that I hope to be able to respond to when I have the opportunity to speak to the legislation.

The member, maybe through a guilty conscience, seems to have some remorse or regret in terms of voting against Bill C-2. Bill C-2 gave millions of Canadians a tax cut. The member opposite perhaps tried to justify his vote by saying that MPs were the beneficiaries of this tax cut. To try to sum it up in that fashion does a disservice to Canada's middle class.

When I think of Canada's middle class, I often think of our teachers, our nurses, our individual factory workers and those people who are working in financial institutions, all of whom are a part of Canada's growing middle class and all of whom were given a substantial tax decrease. Can the member explain to those individuals why he and the Conservative Party voted against that portion of our middle class?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to enlighten the member a little on how the tax system works.

Based on a 2015 assessment, a Canadian who earned \$44,000 received zero dollars back from this so-called middle-income tax cut. A Canadian who earned around \$60,000—for example, teachers, who earned an average of \$65,000 a year—would have received \$261.44 from this tax cut. However, a member of Parliament who earned \$180,000, let us say, and is in an upper tax bracket, would have received \$820.43.

That is wrong. I bring up this issue over and over because the Liberals do not understand how the progressive tax system works. It is debt-financed, and it is wrong to keep pretending that middle-class Canadians received something out of this when every single member of Parliament received a bigger tax cut.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, although my friend from Calgary Shepard and I have very different political perspectives, I value his friendship and I commend him on doing his homework.

He talked a lot about the carbon tax. As a British Columbian, we have had a carbon tax in place that has been very effective. We have had the fastest-growing economy in Canada. That money has been

returned to our communities, and we have done really good work on lowering our impact on climate change.

To put things in perspective, in the last three years we have had the worst forest fires on record. For the last two years, British Columbia has literally been on fire in the summers. People with respiratory illnesses have had to wear face masks. For two weeks last summer, the skies were grey and we had had record floods. Here in Ottawa, there was a flood that caused a state of emergency until recently.

I do not know what it is going to take for the Conservative Party to see that a climate emergency is taking place. What is his proposition to deal with this climate emergency? Does he not recognize that there is a climate emergency happening right now on this planet and that we need to do our part?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, the member and I work together on a group I co-founded called Parliamentary Friends of the Kurds, and he serves as the co-chair of the group.

To his point about the carbon tax in British Columbia, my understanding is that emissions have actually gone up and that the tax is no longer revenue neutral. It is used to raise revenue on the backs of British Columbians.

As well, we see pictures on social media, Google and DuckDuckGo that consistently show sky-high gasoline prices. That is not sustainable in the long term.

Going back to a point a parliamentary secretary made, consumer confidence is back to where it was in 2015 and business confidence is very low as well. If the government keeps raising the input costs for businesses to ship and deliver goods to people, we cannot help but expect that their confidence will go down. If at the end of the day and the end of the year they are paying far more in input costs just to conduct the regular business they did before, we really cannot expect anything else.

A carbon tax is a tax policy; it is not an environmental policy.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of the advantages of 20-minute speeches is that they allow us to go into other areas. In introducing this bill, the member talked about what was happening in my province of Alberta, which is also his province. I agree with him that we have high hopes and that people are starting to realize that we are putting in place a foundation that will bring back investment but would also make sure we do what we can to clean up our environment.

The member talked about carbon pricing on large emitters. This is the way Premier Kenney suggested we would go forward. It has been done before, when the penalty large emitters pay went back into a research and development fund. Out of that, we have seen innovation in new and renewable types of energy. Whether it was clean coal, wind, solar or some of the others, we have seen money poured in to ensure that they are cleaner.

Government Orders

The government's plan right now is that every consumer, senior and single mom will be clobbered at the pumps or in heating their homes. The money invested back will make a difference. Could he talk a bit about how a tax regime helps grow an economy? We are seeing in this bill, the Madagascar—

● (1105)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry, but I have to allow the member to answer and allow for another question. Therefore, I would ask the individuals who are asking questions or making comments to keep their preambles a bit shorter.

The hon. member for Calgary Shepard.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, we have been looking at the carbon tax basically since 2015 in Alberta. Going back to my Yiddish proverb, “When you pour out your heart, it lightens the load”, I think the member lightened his heart. It has been a point of frustration for a lot of Albertans, because we had a system that worked before. Large emitters were paying for emissions above a certain level. The funds from that were going to a climate emissions innovation fund. There were organizations and groups of companies that were coming together under COSIA and others that were exchanging new technologies they were creating. A good example is the large mines in northeastern Alberta. I cannot say how many times I have seen these in *National Geographic* and other papers. Those are the past. The future is in SAGD in situ development. One cannot even tell that there is oil sands development going on in many of these places. I just wish there was not so much misinformation out there on the environmental record of the Alberta government and the Alberta people.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I certainly agree that there is a lot of misinformation. Unfortunately, as much as I am very fond of the member for Calgary Shepard, much of what was in his speech was alarmingly not about the Canada-Madagascar treaty. However, I will indulge that lapse in relevance to point out that the fact that gas prices in B.C. today are high has nothing to do with the carbon tax, as any analyst will tell us. It has to do with refinery capacity.

We used to have four refineries in Burnaby. We are now down to one. It was Chevron. It is now Parkland. It closed down for repairs last year. It is now back up to 92% production. The reality is that even if the government built the Kinder Morgan expansion, it would undermine access to the fuel the refinery needs. That refinery cannot process solid bitumen. The expansion of the Kinder Morgan pipeline is for 100% solid bitumen for export. It is diluted to get it through the pipeline. It is called dilbit. Dilbit cannot be used in our refinery. Therefore, it is a refinery-capacity issue. It has nothing to do with pipelines. We would do better if we processed more Alberta product in Canada for use by Canadians instead of pretending that there is a market in other countries.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands is one of my favourite members to spar with. She must know that refineries are one of the largest emitters of GHGs in Canada. It is true that many refineries have closed down. However, that is thanks to policies her own party supports, such as taxing carbon from emitters like large refineries and upgraders.

I have a brother-in-law who works in that sector. There is nothing wrong with exporting our product in dilbit format or bitumen format. Let us apply that to farmers. Would we tell the farmers who are exporting wheat that they are not allowed to export their wheat but should refine it here and send bread overseas? Should lentil farmers make soup in Canada instead of exporting lentils? We do not do that. It is up to the companies to decide where the value-added is. They have made that decision.

As far as refinery capacity goes, if we did not have the damaging policies of the provincial NDP and the Green Party federally and provincially, we would not be in a situation where refineries continue to close in Canada.

● (1110)

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have to come back to the member for Calgary Shepard, because having been one of the only members in the House of Commons who has actually been ankle deep in oil, having worked at one of the closed oil refineries, I have to state, for the record, that the Conservatives are not only incoherent and illiterate on energy policy and renewable energy policy, but the example the member has just given shows how completely out of touch the Conservatives are when it comes to the basic economics of exporting raw bitumen.

The reality is that the Conservatives love to cosy up to foreign-owned oil companies, but the idea that we would ship Canadian jobs overseas and contribute to a massive increase in greenhouse gas emissions makes no sense at all. It makes no sense to people right across the country, including the people who are suffering from the record levels of flooding we are seeing in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick. In British Columbia, we are already seeing the start of the forest fire season. In the month of May, there are now 15 out-of-control forest fires in British Columbia.

Over the last three years, we have seen our skies covered with smoke in the Lower Mainland and on southern Vancouver Island because of the catastrophic number of forest fires. In the last three years, in the month of August, the air has been unbreathable. Therefore, for Conservatives to say that there is no problem at all, let us just ship raw bitumen overseas, and for the Liberals to support them, shows the degree of irresponsibility we have in the House of Commons. That is something I think Canadians will want to change on October 21.

That being said, I will return to Bill S-6. We support it on this side of the House. We support it because it is the one initiative the Liberals have managed to put forward that does not increase tax havens, money laundering and the legalized tax evasion that is costing this country so much.

Government Orders

There is an idea that this massive tax evasion, started by the Conservatives and continued by the Liberals, with the largest and most profitable Canadian corporations taking their money overseas and not paying taxes on it, is something that is victimless. Somehow it does not hurt Canadians in any way, shape or form. In this corner of the House, we in the NDP caucus can only say that this is simply not true.

We have underfunding of our health care system and the inability of either the former Conservative government or the current Liberal government to bring in pharmacare. One in five Canadians are struggling to pay for their medication. There are Canadians, literally outside the House of Commons, like Jim, whom I have mentioned numerous times, who has to beg on the bridge between the Chateau Laurier and the East Block because of the \$580 a month he has to pay for medication that he cannot cover any other way.

The fact is, we have tens of billions of dollars that should be paid as part of the fair share of Canada's largest and most profitable corporations. Tens of billions of dollars simply evaporate away. They are taken to overseas tax havens and sit in corporate bank accounts, because we do not have a fair and just tax system, which is something that hurts so many Canadians. It hurts Canadians who cannot access health care. It hurts younger Canadians who are forced to go into debt on a scale of tens of thousands of dollars, sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars, just to go to college, university or trade school. They have to borrow the money because of the punitive fees that are charged for college and university.

At the same time, Canada's corporate sector is just laughing. I am not talking about Loblaws and the \$12 million the Liberals doled out to Canada's richest billionaire, which is unbelievable. It is the fact that so many Canadian corporations do not pay their fair share of taxes because of the very intricate network of overseas tax havens, which the Conservatives started and the Liberals promote. That is what causes so much challenge for the average Canadian family, so much so that the average Canadian family is now the most indebted in the industrialized world and the most indebted in Canadian history. That was on the Liberals' watch during the last four years.

• (1115)

We have seen family debt load skyrocket because people are having to pay for medication and are having to struggle to save money because of college and university, because we simply allow that money to go overseas. Instead of having a fair tax system, Canadians are indebting themselves to a record extent, worse than any other country in the industrialized world. One would think the Liberals would say that it is profoundly unfair, that maybe they should do something about this intricate network of tax havens, that they should do something to force the corporate sector to pay its fair share. However, instead, they double down.

They have signed a number of arrangements with overseas tax havens, some of the most notorious in the country. The ones the Conservatives had not yet signed, the Liberals took up, such as the Cook Islands, Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, notorious tax havens where people can put their money, report it and pay zero per cent income tax. Canadian authorities then say that since they paid zero per cent in Antigua, the Cook Islands or Grenada, they do not have to pay a cent in Canada. It is legalized tax evasion to an unbelievable

extent. That is why many of the chartered accountancy firms that specialize in tax avoidance, as they would say, though I call it tax evasion, trumpet the fact that Canada now has the lowest effective tax rate in the industrialized world. It is at 9% for the corporate sector, because it can take so much money overseas.

Single parents, fathers or mothers, struggling to raise their children are indebted to an unbelievable extent but are still paying their taxes, because they believe, as most Canadians believe, that Canadians should pay their fair share of taxes, that we all contribute to this project called Canada, that we all contribute to this country. Canadians struggling to make sure that they are keeping up to date and paying their income taxes like good Canadians can take no comfort from what is massive and unbelievable tax evasion. We have the lowest level of corporate tax in the industrialized world and the highest level of family debt. Yes, those two things are related.

It is not just that. A few minutes ago, the finance critic, the member for Sherbrooke, stood to present a bill that should have been presented four years ago, if the Liberals had kept any of their promises, and 10 years ago if the Conservatives had been truthful to their ideology. It would ensure that the massive web giants, corporations like Facebook and Google, outside the country, which suck advertising dollars and revenue out of Canada, should pay some taxes. What a concept. How radical for these massive, multi-billion dollar companies to actually pay some taxes in Canada.

Conservatives said that they did not have to do it. When the Liberals came to power, they talked about a fair tax system but did nothing to address that. Therefore, as usual, as with medicare and in so many other cases, it is the NDP that is putting forward a plan in the House of Commons to ensure that these massive, multi-billion dollar companies, with enormous profits, actually pay some tax in Canada.

It is not just that, as we know. We have also seen reports coming out of British Columbia on the extent to which Liberal policies have contributed to amplifying, to an extraordinary extent, money laundering in Canada. The report, just last week, from the expert panel on money laundering, shows that under Liberal policies, money laundering has reached a critical stage: \$47 billion in illegal funds were laundered in Canada last year, according to the expert panel. This is the product of criminal activities. This is the product of illegal activities, yet the government refuses to do anything significant to address the massive extent of money laundering.

This is not a victimless crime. The impact on just one sector, the affordable housing market in the Lower Mainland, the area I represent in the House of Commons, with the escalation in prices, now means that so many families in the Lower Mainland are struggling to keep a roof over their heads, or they have to live on the streets or move away.

Government Orders

•(1120)

I cannot tell the House the extent of suffering that comes from allowing this money laundering to continue without any due regard for cracking down or shutting it down. Honest Canadians, the ones who pay their taxes, are the ones who are most badly hurt by what has now been a couple of decades of complete negligence by Conservative and Liberal governments in this regard.

Last year, \$47 billion of illegal money were laundered in Canada. The Liberals do nothing. The Conservatives do not care. However, this has a profound impact on average Canadians, not just on housing prices but on a whole range of activities.

When the finance committee was discussing measures that could have curbed money laundering, the NDP's proposal, which is one of the first recommendations by the expert panel, was to have public accessibility to beneficial ownership registries to ensure we knew how to track the money.

However, the old parties, the parties that have contributed to this system, a system that has been so detrimental for the average Canadian, said no. Members speak with seniors in their ridings. They know how seniors are struggling to make ends meet. Members see young Canadians, who are trying to acquire the skills to contribute to the country, forced to go into debt, in the tens of thousands of dollars. Families are struggling to keep affordable homes over their heads. All Canadians are struggling to pay for their medications. This is all a result of policies that put so much, tens of billions of dollars, in the hands of the very wealthy at the cost of the quality of life of Canadians right across the country.

When we talk about money laundering, the beneficial ownership registry and the NDP's proposal that it be publicly accessible, both of the old parties said no. They did not want to have that. They did not want to have that sunlight that would bring transparency, which Canadians want. It would allow us to combat what has become Canada's black eye around the world. We are now renowned as a haven for money laundering.

The Guardian newspaper talked about Canada being a haven for "snow washing". It is a now a term that is used around the world to describe the systematic use of money laundering in Canada. It can be done through buying real estate. It can be with a whole range of things. It can be done with impunity because the Liberals have refused to fund the resources that would allow our over-strapped, overworked agencies to combat it. The Liberals and the Conservatives refuse to have a publicly accessible beneficial ownership registry that would allow all of us to track the money.

This is the legacy of the Liberal government.

Let us just take a moment to look at what we have after four years of Liberals in power. They could have done so much to help the quality of life of the average Canadian, to address seniors who eat dog and cat food because that is all they can afford if they want to keep a roof over their head, and often even that is not enough. What about people like Jim who have to beg to get enough money for the medication their doctors have prescribed, medications that are absolutely necessary for their health? What have they done to combat the underfunding of our health care system and the skyrocketing tuition fees that are leading so many families to not

even be able to attend university, or college or trade school, at the same time as we have a crisis and shortage of trained and skilled workers in so many sectors?

All of this dysfunction has contributed to the highest level of family debt in the industrialized world. It all comes from the basis of having a profoundly unfair tax system, created by Conservatives and Liberals to benefit their buddies on Bay Street, a system that allows billionaires to get away with not paying taxes. In addition, they get grants that are paid for by those regular taxpayers who do pay their taxes. We saw with the \$12 million the Liberal government handed to Loblaws.

•(1125)

It is shocking that we now have created a fossilized unfair tax system that provides us with the lowest effective tax rate in the industrialized world and ensures that some of the largest web giants on the planet do not have to pay a cent of tax in Canada. Even as they are running into bankruptcy, a whole network of community newspapers and local television and radio stations, sucking that advertising out of the country, they do not have to put anything back. It is a legalized tax evasion.

At the same time, we now know that \$47 billion, and that is a conservative estimate from the expert panel on money laundering, have been laundered in the country in the past year, contributing to the rise of completely unaffordable housing prices for families that are struggling to keep a roof over their heads and contributing in so many ways to deterioration in the quality of life. Things definitely need to change.

[*Translation*]

How can we change that?

The NDP has already proposed putting in place a fair and equitable tax system. We are asking that Canadian corporations pay their fair share of taxes. We do not think that is too much to ask. We are not asking that they pay large sums, like 50% or 60% of their profits. However, an effective rate of 9% for corporations is absolutely ridiculous when we consider that the tax rate for individuals is higher than that. Some people do not have the means to be taxed at that rate, but they contribute to our country. We need to have a system that is fair. For that, the effective rate for corporations has to be greater than 9%.

Secondly, web giants have not been paying any tax in Canada for years. They make billions in profits and pay absolutely nothing. These web giants should pay their fair share of tax. If the NDP is elected to government on October 21, our party will get to work immediately. We will not allow this to continue. Instead of giving billions of dollars in gifts to web giants, we will lower tuition for students who want to go to CEGEP, learn a trade or attend university.

With respect to money laundering, our institutions, such as the RCMP, must have the resources required to deal with these crimes. They are not victimless crimes. This is a situation that has rather significant consequences. Eastern Canada is one of the worst regions in the world in terms of money laundering.

Government Orders

All these elements should be considered. All that is needed is the will to do something about it. In recent years, we have seen that the Liberals did not have the will to put in place a fair tax system. This bill is a small gesture made during four years of inaction on this file, which is extremely costly for Canadians.

In a few weeks, the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer is going to table a report that sheds light on this situation and all the money that is leaving the country. We are ready to examine it. Canadians will then judge the government.

• (1130)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I always find it interesting to listen to the NDP in opposition. I say “NDP in opposition” because when I was an MLA in the Manitoba legislature, the NDP was in government. It was in government for about 15 years and for a good portion of those years, I sat inside the legislature.

One thing I hear consistently from the NDP is that the way to finance every possible expenditure those members can generate in their minds is through corporation taxation. “Make corporations pay” seems to be the standard line they use when they are in opposition. However, interestingly, when I was an MLA, I saw the provincial NDP decrease corporate taxes, not once or twice but seven times.

Could my colleague and friend across the way explain how a provincial NDP government can justify decreasing corporate taxes, while the federal NDP in opposition is banking so much on funding so many promises by increasing corporate taxes? There seems to be a bit of a change from the provincial NDP to the national NDP. Could he explain that to me?

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, I always find the member's perspective interesting.

As he know, the NDP government of Manitoba told the corporate sector that it had to pay its fair share of taxes. The NDP did not allow loopholes and it did not allow tax havens. That is the difference between the two parties. The member has given us a terrific resumé. When the NDP is in power in provinces, it manages money better than any other party.

This is not me speaking. As members from the Conservative Party know, for the last 20 years, the ministry of finance has been producing fiscal period returns, and over the last 20 years, NDP governments have consistently been the best at managing money and paying down debt. The Conservatives know this, and that is why they are heckling. The Liberals know this as well. The Conservatives are in second place and the Liberals are in last place.

When the NDP is in power, it tells the corporate sector that there will be no more loopholes, no more tax havens and that companies will have to pay their fair share of taxes. This then allows us to determine the best level of corporate taxation.

Right now we have a free-for-all. It is the wild west. In fact, companies that are paying their fair share of taxes, which do not rely on an intricate web of overseas tax havens and all kinds of tax

loopholes, are being penalized because the Liberals allow for these tax loopholes. We would close them and put in place a fair rate that applies to all.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like the member to comment on the speech of the parliamentary secretary. He said that we did not have to worry about tax evasion with our tax agreements with other countries because the CRA was on it.

There is example after example where the CRA is not. For instance, a mining company from Canada had a big mine in Mongolia. It made billions of dollars in profits and owed \$600 million in taxes in Canada and \$200 million in Mongolia. It opened a post office box in Luxembourg and wrote the CRA to ask if it was okay. The CRA wrote back and told the company to fill its boots, saying that it was okay. Tax evasion is legal because that is how Canada works.

Could the member comment on that and tell us what is wrong with this picture?

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, the member for South Okanagan—West Kootenay has been a very strong advocate for fair taxation in this House over the last few years, which is why he is much beloved by his constituents. He is also one of the hardest-working members of Parliament I have ever seen in the House of Commons. He does a tremendous job.

The member points out what we all know to be true. What did the Liberals do about the Isle of Man scam? Millionaires can take their money overseas, get a little receipt for a charity and then get all the money back without having paid a cent in taxes. The Liberals have said that these people have lawyers and are too big to prosecute so they can do it. Under the Liberal government, people can do any scam they want on taxes if they are wealthy enough. The example my colleague cites is endemic now in the tax system.

The Liberals' response is that they have put a bit of money into CRA. What they do not tell the public, of course, is that the money they put into it is just replacing the positions of people who have left CRA. Why? The low morale in that institution is because under the Liberals the CRA is going after small business people. People with disabilities are having their disability tax credits denied. No wonder there is a problem in the tax system, when people with disabilities and seniors are being attacked for the least indiscretion but millionaires and billionaires get off scot-free.

That is unfair, and we will change that on October 21.

• (1135)

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am encouraged today that the NDP colleagues said that they would be supporting this legislation. Most parties in this House will be supporting it. We are getting quite used to seeing the New Democratic Party, in this Parliament and the last, oppose trade agreements. It is good to see that it understands the importance of tax treaties.

Government Orders

In the Conservative Party, we believe that if we are going to have a strong economy, we need to have good trade relationships around the world, fair trade relationships. We need to have tax treaties that provide confidence to investors in whichever country they may be investing, foreign investors here and our investors there. That is important.

Also, on the training side, Conservatives believe that for a strong economy we need to have innovation and trade here. Does the member have any suggestions? The tax treaty we are signing is very similar to a tax model put out by the OECD. What are the important parts of a treaty that would make him agree with me that these types of tax treaties that encourage investment are vital to our local national economy?

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, we are supporting Bill S-6 because we have read the bill and we know that the Madagascar taxation rate is roughly similar to Canada's. Other taxation agreements that the government has signed, or tax arrangements with overseas tax havens, we do not support. When the tax level is 0%, it is a tax haven. It is a way of legalizing tax evasion.

In the same way, it is why we often did not support Conservative trade agreements under the last Parliament. Conservative fair trade is an oxymoron. The Conservatives have never signed a fair trade agreement, ever.

What we would do is actually look at the trade agreement. We would do our due diligence. We would ask officials what kind of impact analysis was done on a trade agreement. Time after time, under the Harper government, they would say that no analysis was done. They wanted to do the ribbon-cutting but they had done no analysis.

That is why, systematically under the Harper government, trade agreement after trade agreement, our exports to those markets fell and the imports from those markets rose. That is why we had a record trade deficit under the Harper government. Conservatives did not read the fine print. They simply sold the farm every single time. Not once did they do an economic impact analysis. Not once did they have an understanding of how many jobs they would lose. On trade, Conservatives were absolutely irresponsible, and that is one of the reasons they are sitting in the opposition side of the House.

• (1140)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have listened to the debate on Bill S-6 this morning and I must say there are plenty of things that one can draw upon in order to shed more light and to be a bit more forthright with respect to the bill.

The Government of Canada and the Liberal Party of Canada recognize the important role that trade plays in the development of our nation. Having observed the NDP for many years now, it is my experience that as a general rule that party does not support trade agreements.

There have been dozens of trade agreements. On one occasion, the vote was not a recorded vote, so NDP members claimed not to have voted against the bill. They might have voted in favour of one other bill. A couple of MPs have indicated they have voted in favour of

trade, but as a general rule the NDP does not support trade agreements between Canada and other countries, and that is somewhat unfortunate.

Bill S-6 is about a tax treaty with Madagascar. Madagascar has wonderful opportunities for Canadians, and individuals from that country have opportunities here in Canada. We have many tax treaties with countries around the world, and tax treaties provide significant benefits to both countries.

That is why it is with pleasure that I rise today to address this legislation and to add my comments on a wide variety of issues, all stemming from our economy, social justice and the tax laws that we currently have. I have a fairly wide spectrum to work from based on the debate I have heard so far today. Let me attempt to do it in the best way I can.

The number that comes to my mind, which ultimately demonstrates what this government has been able to accomplish by working with Canadians, is one million, and that is a fairly recent number that has come out relating to employment.

It is worth mentioning that since we took office in October 2015, we have seen the generation of over one million new jobs. That is historic, in the sense of the last 40 or 50 years. It is an incredible number of jobs, and it is due in good part to the policies that this government has put in place, budgetary measures and legislative measures, all with the idea of supporting Canada's middle class and those aspiring to be a part of it.

Day after day, for weeks, months and years, our government has taken Canada's middle class seriously. We have developed progressive measures to assist middle-class Canadians, bringing forward policies that will support them, policies such as the Canada child benefit program and the guaranteed income supplement for our seniors, which have added great value to our economy.

We hear a lot about taxation. People expect to pay their fair share. From day one, our government has taken this very seriously.

• (1145)

Members will recall that during the last election, today's Prime Minister made a commitment to Canadians that there would be a tax cut for the middle class. If members look at Bill C-2, which was our first piece of legislation, they will see that we delivered on that tax cut, which put hundreds of millions of dollars into the pockets of Canadians. I would argue that the money going into the pockets of Canadians enabled them to increase their disposable income, allowing them to spend more into the economy, and it is one of the reasons for the one million-plus jobs that have been generated. Working with Canadians, investing in Canadians, allowing Canadians to have more disposable income has allowed Canada's economy to perform that much better.

Government Orders

Taxation policy matters. The NDP and the most recent speaker talked about tax fairness and said that the rich need to pay more. That was an important part of the very first budget we brought forward, in which Canada's wealthiest 1% had to pay more. The millions raised through that one initiative supported giving Canada's middle class a tax break. The issue of tax fairness, much like the tax break, has been of the utmost importance to this government. It was one of the very first actions taken when we assumed office in 2015, recognizing some of the comments made today, whether it was the NDP talking about tax fairness or the Conservatives talking about the tax on Canada's middle class.

When the member for Calgary Shepard asked who benefits from the tax break that we gave to the middle class and then said it is members of Parliament who benefit, I think of the tens of thousands of teachers, the tens of thousands of nurses, the tens of thousands of factory workers or the tens of thousands of people who work for our financial institutions. Those individuals also benefited from that tax break.

I indicated that when I had the opportunity, I would put some facts on the record, and there is no disputing what I have said, because it is all factually correct. The government has consistently gone out of its way to develop policy through legislation and budgetary measures that has had a positive impact on Canada's middle class.

The tax treaty that we are debating today is all about international relationships and ways for these treaties to further advance Canadian interests. This is not the only tax treaty legislation that we have put forward in the last three years. Bill S-4 also dealt with tax treaties. It is not the first time we have had to deal with tax treaties, because we understand and appreciate the true value of having these types of treaties with countries. It allows us to have a better sense of taxes flowing, both here in Canada and in the country in question. It provides additional security, if I can put it that way, for investments flowing to countries with which we have tax treaties.

• (1150)

We recognize, as we do on the broader picture, trade and international relations. No government in recent history has done more with respect to trade agreements than this government. The previous government likes to say that it had 30-plus trade agreements, but that is just not true. Through this administration, we have been able to sign more trade agreements than any other government in the last 40 to 50 years. Since trade agreements have been tied into tax agreements or tax treaties, I would challenge any member in the House to list a government that has been able to accomplish so much in such a short period of time on that file.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order, please. I would remind the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman that he will have an opportunity to ask questions or make comments at the proper time. I would ask him to be quiet until such time as the parliamentary secretary is finished his speech, which will be in about eight minutes.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, with respect to treaties and trade, the approach this government has taken in regard to

international relations has supported our economy. By supporting our economy in many different ways, it has had a profoundly positive impact on the generation of jobs.

We can look at the province of Manitoba and at an industry I have cited in the past, which is the pork industry. It provides thousands of jobs in the province. In any given year, we have more pigs than people in Manitoba. Plants out toward Neepawa export 95%-plus of their production to Asia. However, the industry provides hundreds of direct jobs on the factory floor and hundreds of additional jobs outside the factory.

Those jobs would not exist if we did not have the international relations we have today. Whether it is cattle or pork, members will see significant increases in the last few years. I like to believe it is because of the approach, in part, and working with Canadians and other stakeholders, encouraging the development of those industries and taking advantage of the agreements on which we have signed off.

At times, the Conservatives will say that they brought it close to the goal line. As we know, it is not bringing it to the post that matters as much as it is getting it over the post. We have been very successful at doing that.

The CETA agreement is a great example. It involved a couple of dozen countries. It was completely off the rails and had it not been for our current Minister of Foreign Affairs, that deal never would have gotten over the goal line. We are still hopeful the European Union will get behind it 100%, as its respective legislative bodies continue to deal with the issue.

Whether it is recognizing the value of our tax treaties or the benefits of getting engaged with the countries, and we are talking about dozens of countries, Canada has been successful in negotiating these treaties, which provide assurances in progressing on the trade file. In a relatively short period of time, the government has been able to accomplish a great deal on both accounts.

We hear a lot from the opposition benches about tax avoidance. Again, we have seen the government not only talk about it but invest in it. For two consecutive years, the government invested additional monies, almost \$1 billion, hundreds of millions in each of two separate budgets, in the Canada Revenue Agency to go after individuals who try to avoid paying taxes.

We have taken this very seriously, along with tax evasion. In three years, the government has done more to go after individuals for tax evasion than the previous government did in 10 years. The same applies to tax avoidance. We have recognized the importance of doing the follow up, of looking at ways to ensure that those who are supposed to be paying their fair share are doing so.

• (1155)

We do not need to take lessons from the opposition, in particular the Conservative opposition, on this because it has virtually ignored the problem by not investing. If anything, it divested. It took money away from the CRA. Cuts were brought by the Conservative administration.

Government Orders

When I put forward a question for the member for New Westminster—Burnaby, he talked about taxation policy. He implied that we needed to go after corporations and make them pay more. I give the NDP an A-plus for consistency on it while it is in opposition, but that is it. I underline words, “while in opposition”.

I have witnessed first-hand an NDP government in my home province of Manitoba. What I hear from the NDP in opposition is in contrast to what I hear from the NDP in government. It is like night and day. When the NDP was in government in Manitoba, it cut corporate taxes seven times, as I pointed out in my question.

We can look at the record and the many comments today by my colleague and friend from the NDP. He has tried to shape the debate as if the NDP is the strong advocate for tax fairness. In the last three years, we have seen a national government not only come up with tax treaties to ensure there is a stronger sense of tax fairness at the international level, but also it has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in Revenue Canada to go after individuals who avoid or evade paying their taxes. Those are significant sums of money.

All of this together is what we have been able to do in the last three and a half years. I look forward to the next six months. There is a lot more we want to do to continue to support Canada's middle class, those aspiring to be a part of it and those who need to be ensured that there is a sense of social justice.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to the member opposite who just spoke. He said that it is very important to him and his party to fight tax evasion. However, after signing 90 tax conventions with other countries, Canada still does not have legislation to fight tax evasion.

For several years, the NDP has been calling for legislation that will require the automatic disclosure and exchange of banking information. The Liberals have always refused to pass such laws, and we are losing billions of dollars every year. As we have said many times, this money could be invested in education and health. It could help us protect the environment.

A report released today called “The KidsRights Index 2019” ranks Canada 49th on protecting children's rights, even though Canada is a G7 country. The index is based on the following five criteria: right to life, right to health, right to education, right to protection, and enabling environment for child rights.

Young people across the country are taking to the streets to denounce the fact that Canada is not doing enough to protect the environment. Young people with ENvironnement JEUnesse have even taken legal action against Canada for violating their environmental rights. The government likes to pat itself on the back for investing \$1 billion in the Canada Revenue Agency, but that investment has not led to any prosecutions. There is a shortage—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I would ask hon. members to ask shorter questions. The last one was nearly two minutes long.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, there are many aspects to the question that I would love to be able to address, but due to time constraints I will have to pick and choose.

The New Democrats want to believe that if we pass a law here in the House of Commons, there would not be a thing known as tax evasion. Businesses would just set up a bank account and deposit the monies into it and we would not have to worry about it. All we have to do is click our heels and pass the law and there would not be such a thing as tax evasion.

It does not work that way.

The member opposite made reference to the need to go after them and see prosecutions. Holding individuals accountable for attempting to avoid paying taxes and investing hundreds of millions of dollars into CRA does not necessarily mean that everything has to go to court. By having these discussions and bringing more people to the table, we are getting money back that is owed to Canada.

Is it enough? It is absolutely not. We can always do more. In my concluding remarks I indicated that we have accomplished a great deal in the last three and a half years, and I hope Canadians will see fit to return us so we can continue working for Canadians and continue to support our middle class and others.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have heard from my colleague from Burnaby and my friend from Quebec. I appreciate their bringing forward concerns around corporations using tax havens and tax loopholes to shovel buckets of money out of our country. We know that tens of billions of dollars have been moved offshore, where they are not paying their fair share of taxes. Small business people and middle-class working people are paying their fair share, building the roads and hospitals and all of the infrastructure across our country, while big corporations and the elite and the friends of the Liberals and Conservatives are able to shovel their money through these tax agreements.

The government had an opportunity to close loopholes for those tax agreements that are not working for Canadians, to keep that money in our country so that those who are not paying their fair share would pay their fair share. The member talked about governments and NDP governments provincially across this country. It is the solicitor general in the B.C. NDP government who is going after those tax evaders. In fact, it is through his investigative work that we learned that over \$5 billion was washed in British Columbia in the real estate market. The B.C. Liberals, the previous provincial government, sat idle and did nothing about it.

What about the priorities? Why is the government not fixing these loopholes that are protecting the Liberals' friends, the elite, the rich and the big corporations that are not paying their share?

• (1205)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the New Democrats have super-fantastic lines to try to generate this public appeal and be seen as the great defenders of the taxpayer, saying that if we have a billion dollars, we could give it to the children or to the poor seniors.

Government Orders

However, when the tire hits the road, how do the New Democrats actually behave in the House? When we increased the Canada child benefit, they voted against it. That Canada child benefit took 300,000 children out of poverty here in Canada, yet the New Democrats voted against it. When we increased the guaranteed income supplement, the NDP voted against that too. That lifted tens of thousands of seniors out of poverty situations. Both initiatives had a profoundly positive impact in the riding of Winnipeg North, throughout Canada and in all regions of our country, yet the NDP voted against them. When we gave the tax break to Canada's middle class, the New Democrats voted against that too. At the same time, we put in place a special tax increase for Canada's wealthiest 1% of people, and they voted against that too.

The New Democrats are not consistent. They have spin lines that they use while they are in opposition, but when they hit government at the provincial level, those lines seem to go out the window. I say that because I have had far too many years of first-hand experience sitting in opposition and watching NDP governments. All I am asking from the NDP is to be consistent.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, we know that the B.C. premier and cabinet are meeting tomorrow to consider whether they are going to do an inquiry into money laundering. When the federal Liberal meets tomorrow, will they also agree to have an inquiry into the money laundering that has been happening in our country federally? That is a question Canadians want answered. They want to know that the government is going to take the situation seriously.

The government has not arrested anyone in the Panama papers, while other countries have taken action. The government announced a billion dollars to fight tax evasion in this country and is chasing small business, because clearly it is not getting action when it comes to the Panama papers.

Maybe the hon. parliamentary secretary can address that. Will the federal government follow the Province of British Columbia with a national inquiry into tax evasion if B.C. decides to move forward tomorrow?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, this government has recognized the importance of ensuring that individuals who are attempting to avoid paying taxes are being held to more account. That is the reason we invested literally hundreds of millions of dollars. As I pointed out, it was close to a billion dollars over the last couple of budgets. By the way, the NDP voted against that also. Those are real, tangible dollars that are flowing to prevent people from avoiding paying their fair share of taxes.

This is the government that in the last two years has entered into other tax treaties. By entering into tax treaties, hopefully we will be that much more successful at preventing other companies from doing some of the nasty things that we know they are doing

This government does recognize the seriousness of the issue. I suspect that if one were to look into the details, one would find virtually on all fronts that we have seen significant progress on these types of files in the last three and a half years, especially in comparison to the 10 years of the former Harper government, when we saw virtually nothing on all three of those fronts.

●(1210)

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always good to rise in the House, and as I have announced I will not be running in the next election, every time I rise in the House, I am still overwhelmed with not just the beauty of the chamber, but also the great responsibility I have had from the people of Battle River—Crowfoot in being entrusted with bringing their voices to Ottawa.

Today we rise to support Bill S-6, an act to implement a convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar that has the objective of eliminating double taxation and preventing tax evasion. Tax treaties of this nature meet this objective through the sharing of information between signatory countries.

We know that for governments to build strong economies at home, it is important that they look at a number of very important subjects. All three or four of the points that I want to make today deal with having a strong economy at home. They deal with making sure that jobs stay here at home, making sure that our young people are not travelling overseas necessarily to work but can find jobs here so that we can prosper here at home, and making sure that Canadians who invest abroad or find work abroad will have a better opportunity to prosper there.

There are some very important conditions that have to be laid out in order to find that prosperity and allow those jobs to be created. We know in the Conservative Party know that one of the vitally important aspects of securing a strong economy and creating jobs is trade. We are an exporting country. Canada, whether it is resources or agriculture, exports more than what we use at home. We are a vast country. Our geography and land mass make us a country of amazing opportunity. It is one of the largest countries in land mass in the world.

However, compared to many other countries, our population base is fairly small. We have only 35 or 36 million people. How do we guarantee that we will be able to prosper in spite of having a small population base? One way is through trade, through making sure that our resources and our agriculture can be sold and marketed around the world.

I live in a fairly rural riding in Alberta, a province whose economy has been hurt over the last four or five or six years in a remarkable way. In my riding, we have many different industries and many different sectors of the economy: gas and oil, resources, coal. We are rich in resources in Alberta, and my riding is also very strong in agriculture.

With all of these, we have a high level of exportation of our products. In order to have a free trade agreement in South America, we realized that people there had a desire to secure a safe food supply and were looking to Canada to provide grains, oilseeds, pulse crops, and other agricultural products, including beef and pork. Much of the food stock for the world is created in Canada, and much of it in Alberta.

We realized that we want to have free trade agreements with many countries, and if we do not have a free trade agreement with a country, we still want to have some kind of opportunity to trade with that country.

Government Orders

•(1215)

We do not have a free trade agreement with China, but we still carry on a great amount of trade with China. However, always, agreements enhance our trade. Likewise, agreements on taxes will enhance it as well.

Regarding our agricultural products, right now we are really feeling the pinch with canola. We are feeling the pinch, with one of our largest markets, China, basically stopping our canola from coming into that country. We believe that this is unfair and ungrounded. We have no doubt that this is not about food safety. It is not about the product. As I have said, we have the safest, best product in the world. However, we do not have a free trade agreement with China. Maybe when we see what is happening, we understand why we do not have a free trade agreement with China.

Right now, our canola farmers are really feeling the pinch. Indeed, at this time of year, in the spring, when our crops are being planted, I am getting calls to my office asking me if I am expecting the market to open up. They are asking whether they should be planting canola or cutting way back, although their rotation does not allow them to do that. We are hearing all the concerns coming from agriculture with regard to trade.

The Conservative government had a free trade agreement with Europe. We were pretty well ready to sign onto the TPP. It was not ratified, but everything was laid out. We wanted to get our product into these countries so that we could prosper at home.

However, it is not all about trade. If we want a strong economy, we also have to recognize that we have to have training. We have to have a skilled workforce. We have to be able to invest so that when times get tough, if we cannot compete with Mexico on wages to manufacture, we can compete with the skill sets we have here in Canada. Therefore, we invested greatly in training young people and enhancing the skill sets our workforce had already. This was a driving force in our Conservative government in the last 10 years we governed. We put money into innovation and training.

It was trade, training and red tape. How are we going to have job creation? How are we going to enhance it? How are we going to attract businesses to start up in Alberta, or wherever in Canada, if the red tape to get that business going is a mile long?

We brought forward a red tape reduction strategy to make it easier for businesses, investors and job creators to create those jobs right here at home. That job is unending. With more government and more bureaucracy, the tendency is to see red tape grow. One of the strong things we brought forward was making sure that we were able to cut red tape, and we still need to do it. Therefore, I am pleased that Premier Kenney is committed to the reduction of red tape. There is a level of optimism we have not seen in Alberta for many years. I would also say that our government has always and would continue to look at ways to enhance job creation through the cutting of the red tape burden.

The fourth and final aspect, besides trade, training and red tape, is taxes. If we are not a country that can attract manufacturing and investment because our tax regime is so out of whack, then we cannot expect to see our economy grow. We cannot expect that people will have confidence in investing their capital here in Canada.

In Alberta, because of regulation, red tape and high taxes, including the carbon tax, we saw between \$80 billion and \$100 billion in foreign investment capital flee, and with that went jobs and hope for a lot of young Canadians and Albertans.

•(1220)

To have a strong economy, we have to make sure that we have a strong tax system that has integrity but is also not overly burdensome. When the Conservatives came to power, and when the world fell into a global recession, we moved our corporate rate from 22% to 15%, because we knew that business and manufacturing would flee to the United States or Mexico, predominantly, and other places if we did not compete with a tax structure or a tax rate that would attract investors to Canada.

A lot is about taxes. A lot of what we want to do in building a strong economy is in regard to the tax structure. Tax levels make a large impact on investment, and we have seen that.

Canada not only mines and extracts resources around the world, it invests around the world. We have people who prosper and earn an income from foreign investment. We want to be sure that if we are allowing that, we avoid double taxation. If taxation is important, who, as an investor, would want double taxation, where a country, Madagascar, in this case, would tax us, and then Canada would when we came back home? How much investment do members think would take place in those countries, and here, if we allowed double taxation?

Predominantly where we have massive investment, we have double taxation treaties. A tax treaty contains rules regarding the circumstances under which a signatory country may collect certain taxes on income so that when investors invest, they are aware. They look at the treaty and say that this is what we have to pay, this is what we do not have to pay and this is what we will pay back home. It is a single tax base. In the absence of a tax treaty, the income of a Canadian citizen abroad would be hit on both sides, and investors would flee.

For that reason, we come to this today. This debate, I would say, is the meat and potatoes of what is going on here in Parliament. This is not a day when we are talking about the issues that are really important to Canadians. I do not know if I have had a call to my office in Camrose about Madagascar. My constituents expect that we are taking care of business so that they can prosper, whether on the farm, in investing or in the oil patch.

Most of the tax treaties to which Canada is partnered follow the Model Tax Convention. This is a tax treaty or convention that is given as a model by the OECD, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. This was done in 1963, and subsequent to that, there have been a number of occasions when it has been revised. Currently, Canada is signatory to 93 agreements. This is not something new. We are not stepping out into uncharted territory. This is common.

Government Orders

As I said at the outset, I fully support the intent of Bill S-6, but I am particularly concerned about the tax evasion side. We have heard much from all parties today about tax evasion and the ability of the Canada Revenue Agency to consistently enforce compliance rules and collect taxes.

I do not like high taxes. I look for ways to cut taxes. I formerly served as the minister of state for finance. We looked at every opportunity we could to drive this economy by lowering taxes and keeping more money in the pockets of Canadians. However, tax evasion is different. I think every Canadian expects that there is a certain level of taxes that they are required and willing to pay, not just by law but in order to have the services we have here in Canada.

• (1225)

From report 7 of the 2018 fall reports of the Auditor General of Canada, on compliance activities of the Canada Revenue Agency, the public accounts committee, which I have had the privilege of chairing, learned the following: “Most taxpayers are individuals with Canadian employment income. We found that the Agency requested information from these taxpayers more quickly,” and this is the important part, “and gave less time to respond, than it did with other taxpayers, such as international and large businesses, and taxpayers with offshore transactions.”

The Auditor General went on:

For example, if the Agency asked an individual to provide a receipt to support a claimed expense and the taxpayer did not provide the receipt within 90 days, the Agency would automatically disallow the expense as an eligible income tax deduction. The Agency would assess the taxpayer’s income tax return on the basis of the information it had available and would notify the taxpayer of the taxes due.

In other words, average middle-income Canadians are not cut much slack when it comes to their domestic income here in Canada.

Comparatively, the Auditor General's report states:

For other taxpayers, such as those with offshore transactions, we found that the time frame to provide information was sometimes extended for months or even years. For example, banks and foreign countries could take months to provide information on the taxpayer’s offshore transactions to the Agency or the taxpayer.

It continues, and this is important:

Sometimes the Agency did not obtain information at all, and the file was closed without any taxes assessed.

We can see that these agreements are vital. These agreements enhance what the CRA is given. If people understand the treaty, they know what to claim, they know what to put forward and they know what to show CRA. They feel less vulnerable to the Canada Revenue Agency and can also invest with greater confidence.

The Auditor General's office said that “over the past five years... the Agency took, on average, more than a year and a half to complete audits of offshore transactions.”

These agreements speed that up. The fall 2018 report was not the first time the Auditor General noted how long it took the agency to enforce compliance. The Auditor General further stated:

As we noted in the 2013 Spring Report of the Auditor General of Canada, Chapter 3, Status Report on Collecting Tax Debts—Canada Revenue Agency, the longer it took the Agency to enforce compliance, the less likely it could collect the taxes due. This was especially true for taxpayers with offshore assets, who may have been inclined to liquidate assets or transfer funds to make it more difficult for the Agency to obtain information and collect taxes due. On the other hand, for individuals and

domestic businesses, the Agency had a better likelihood of collection by garnishing wages and seizing assets.

To add insult to injury, the Auditor General found that the Canada Revenue Agency did not proactively consider waiving penalties and interest consistently for all taxpayers. Again, the Auditor General stated:

We found that the Agency offered to waive interest and penalties for taxpayers in some compliance activities but not others—even when the Agency had caused the delays.

The inconsistent application of relief for taxpayers contradicts the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, according to the Auditor General. The report states:

[the] Taxpayer Bill of Rights gives all taxpayers the right to have the law applied consistently. It also gives all taxpayers the right to receive entitlements, such as benefits, credits, and refunds, and to pay no more and no less than what is required by law.

Although it may not quite be unanimous, I am pleased that most in this House, as far as I can see, see the importance of these kinds of meat and potatoes regulations and bills. Coming into compliance and making sure that Canadian investors are not vulnerable or put on an uneven playing field is imperative if we are going to increase foreign investment coming to our country and our investment in those countries, all of which will help build the economy, help Canada prosper and help us create jobs.

• (1230)

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed listening to the speech from the member opposite on a double taxation convention, and there are some things I agree with. One is the investment. I think all of us in the House agree on the importance of investing in infrastructure, in a skilled workforce and in innovation. Certainly we agree on the importance of reducing red tape.

One thing I do not agree with is the member's reference to this issue as a “meat and potatoes” issue. I represent New Brunswick Southwest, so I would say double taxation is a “fish and chips” issue.

I would like the member to speak about double taxation in my province, where people who have two homes or who have a camp or a cottage are being charged double the taxes regardless. Since the member opposite talked about the domestic aspect of taxation, I would like him to speak to this issue in the context of New Brunswick, noting the disadvantage placed on real estate investment when there is a double taxation charge for owning a second home.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, for sure the Madagascar tax treaty is a “fish and chips” kind of issue. I thank my colleague for her encouraging words and her compliment.

Government Orders

With respect to how we want to encourage investment in this country, we want all levels of government to recognize that we can tax anything to the extent that people will refuse to invest in it.

This is something the parliamentary secretary pointed out with regard to the New Democratic Party, and he was right. I do not agree with him all the time, but on some things I do. We can literally tax the corporate and business sectors so that they move across the border, and that does not suit us well.

The member brought up homes and real estate. Some people have a cottage and others buy a secondary home because their child is going to university and they want a home in the same city. Taxing them creates a disincentive, and it affects the markets. The member is right.

This is an issue that causes people to say no. They cannot and will not do it, because they do not want to give up everything they saved to get a house so that their child can live near their university, as they will perhaps get walloped by two levels of government. It is unfair.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too enjoyed the member's speech. There was lots of good information in it.

Interestingly, in my riding of Kootenay—Columbia, I do not hear a lot of concern from my constituents regarding their taxation levels, but I hear a lot of concern about the tax evasion and tax avoidance committed largely by large corporations. There is a feeling that the system really is not fair.

Does the member think Canada should propose legislative changes to the Canadian tax code to prevent tax evaders from using our overly flexible laws to avoid paying their fair share to the Government of Canada? Would this not make things a lot more equal for taxpayers in general?

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate what I said earlier. The Conservative government did all it could to lower taxes at a very difficult time globally. The world fell into a recession, and we immediately evaluated where we were as a country. Were we going to attract investment or were we not? We lowered taxes. That being said, we also very much understood that we needed to have a fair rate of taxation, and we expected people to abide by and honour the law and pay taxes that were due.

Speaking of the CRA, the Auditor General's report said:

In addition, we found that even though the Agency's own policies allowed it, the Agency waived \$17 million in interest and penalties, despite the fact that the taxpayers were identified as at risk for non-compliance and were undergoing an audit at the time they asked for relief.

Let us think about this. CRA knew that money should have been paid and decided to waive it. It would just blot it out and give tax relief. As with all the audits, the Auditor General made a series of recommendations to CRA that would prevent that.

Most Canadians have just finished filing their tax returns, and we are dependent on that revenue coming in for our social programs, such as health care, education and others. However, it is an issue, as the parliamentary secretary said earlier. If there was an easy way to do it, a magic wand that would bring back all the money that was owed, we would love to have it. There is not, but tax treaties like this

give a bit of certainty or confidence to those who are investing abroad.

● (1235)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I was so pleased to hear my colleague from Battle River—Crowfoot citing the very last report from our late and much-missed Auditor General, Mr. Ferguson, which took aim at the preferential treatment CRA gives. On a basis of empirical data, studying everything the CRA does, the Auditor General audited and found that when an average Canadian owes CRA a little money, CRA goes after that person and goes after that person for interest. However, CRA gives fat cats with offshore tax accounts extra time, saying it is a complicated, offshore situation.

In fact, as the hon. member pointed out, only for the wealthiest do CRA officials voluntarily offer to have interest charges waived on money owed. My daughter, who is a university student, was audited last year on her income tax to verify the textbooks she bought and to provide receipts again. It is a very disturbing reality that CRA officials would prefer to go after people who cannot afford to hire lawyers than to tackle the tax avoidance displayed in the Panama papers. We are the only country that has not gone after the offshore accounts revealed by the Panama papers.

My dear friend from Battle River—Crowfoot and I do not always agree on things. We do love each other, but we do not always agree on things. On this occasion, I celebrate his speech.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I am going to look back on that statement in my retirement and say that the leader of the Green Party appreciated my speech. I had better look at the script again to make sure I did not veer off from what I believe. I appreciate it, and I thank her. As she knows, we have a very good working relationship, which is what I try to have with all members of all political parties here in the House. It is vital.

She mentioned our late, much-loved Auditor General, Michael Ferguson, and his report. This goes back to 2013 as well, but in his last report he laid out recommendations to help increase the amounts of money the CRA would be able to collect.

I remain skeptical about whether the CRA will in fact implement the recommendations of the late Auditor General, but I can tell members that we have a public accounts committee that will hold the CRA and every department to account. It is an all-party, non-partisan committee. I chair it. We work very hard to be non-partisan, because it is in the best interests of Canadians, Parliament and all parties that the departments deliver what is expected and required in an accountable and transparent way, without wasting a lot of money. Therefore, we will hold the CRA to account.

Government Orders

With respect to the CRA's action plan, we will make sure it enforces or implements the recommendations that the late Auditor General and we as a committee made, and that it abides by the timelines and responsibilities it has agreed to. If it does not, although we may be non-partisan and collegial, we will not be quite so collegial when we invite CRA representatives back the next time. It is never a good time when departments get called back because they have not lived up to their action plans.

I am skeptical, but I expect the CRA will try. Every deputy I have met wants to deliver on the late Auditor General's recommendations. Therefore, I am hopeful the CRA will implement those recommendations, as well as the recommendations from the public accounts committee.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Greg Fergus (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and Minister of Digital Government, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be participating in this debate on Senate Bill S-6 in my new role.

I would like to start by saluting my colleague opposite for his fine speech on this bill. I will continue in the same vein and express my support for this bill.

Until just recently, I was a member of the Standing Committee on Finance. I sat on the committee for nearly three years, and I absolutely loved it. We got to examine all the issues that fall to the federal government, including all bills related to taxation authority, and review our government's finances. One of the last studies I took part in was about Bill S-6, an act to implement the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income. It is part of our government's agenda for ensuring tax fairness and a fair tax system.

[*English*]

Before I get into the details of the legislation, I would first like to underscore the fact that this is not only part of this government's tax fairness agenda, but this also places itself within a whole framework of what we are trying to achieve to help Canadians who are trying to keep their taxes low, including small businesses as well as for middle-class families.

When our government took office three and a half years ago, we made a commitment to invest in growth and we made it while upholding the principle of fairness for all taxpayers. This proposed legislation goes a long way toward that end.

A fair tax system is key to ensuring that the benefits of a growing economy accrue to all and are felt by more and more people, especially people with good, well-paying jobs for the middle class and for everyone who works hard to join it.

[*Translation*]

I would like to remind hon. members that one of the first things our government did was lower taxes on the middle class and raise them for the wealthiest 1%. Over nine million Canadians benefited from that measure. That really fills me with pride. All members can

take pleasure in knowing that nine million Canadian families enjoy a much lighter tax burden today.

After the middle-class tax cut, we took steps to replace the old system of child benefits with the Canada child benefit. I take pride in that measure because it fulfilled an election promise. The leader of the Liberal Party of Canada made that promise in my riding, Hull—Aylmer, surrounded by middle-class families and families hoping to join them. These people work hard to build a stable family life.

• (1245)

It is one of the biggest promises we have ever made, and the result is that 300,000 children were lifted out of poverty in Canada. That is remarkable.

I have been involved in federal politics for a long time now. I started here, in 1988, as a page in the House of Commons. I remember there was a debate that year called “campaign 2000”. The idea was to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000.

We made that commitment in 1988. Every single government since has made it too. However, it was not until 2015, when the current Liberal government was elected, that we were able to accomplish great things in that area. We cut the child poverty rate by a third, which is remarkable, and we did it in one fell swoop. It was one of the most important social programs—if not the most important—to have ever been implemented in Canadian history.

I would now like to return to the bill on the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar. As I said earlier, I am on the Standing Committee on Finance; we examined the provisions of the bill and we unanimously voted to support this bill without amendment. I am very proud that we have now reached the stage where it is up to the House of Commons to approve it.

I know that this is not something that we generally do when we introduce a bill, but as a former member of the Standing Committee on Finance, it is very important for me to review and explain the five major clauses of the bill without getting into too much detail.

First, this bill sets the maximum withholding tax rate on dividends at 5%. That is important, particularly if the beneficial owner is a company that controls at least 25% of the voting power in the company paying the dividends. It sets the maximum withholding tax rate at 15% in all other cases. The first provision is consistent with other double taxation treaties that Canada has with a number of other countries in the world.

Second, the bill sets the maximum withholding tax rate on interest at 10% and eliminates withholding taxes when interest is paid in respect of a loan made, guaranteed or insured by a public agency or the central bank of one of the states or when the beneficial owner of the interest operates exclusively to administer or provide benefits under one or more pension, retirement or employee benefits plans, subject to certain other conditions. As I said, that is completely normal. That is something we do in the 93 other double taxation treaties that Canada has with other countries.

Government Orders

• (1250)

[*English*]

The third element of this double taxation treaty sets the minimum withholding rate of 10% of the gross amount of royalties and further provides for the withholding tax on certain royalties. This is particularly important, especially for people who might be involved in companies such as in the mining sector.

As members know, Canada is a worldwide leader with respect to investment in mining companies and in doing these investments around the world. It is very important for Canadians who are working for these companies in these countries to have this opportunity to participate and be protected by these taxation agreements.

The fourth element includes a provision to avoid potential double taxation that can arise in respect of the capital gains that an individual realizes on the deemed disposition of property upon immigration between two states, in this case between Canada and Madagascar.

This proposed bill will benefit Canadians by boosting our exports abroad, making it easier for Canadians to take part in these activities. In doing so, Canadians will know they are protected by these measures on double taxation.

Tax fairness is as important to Canadians as it is to our government's plan for economic growth. It is very important that Canadians know their hard work will be rewarded with greater opportunities and a fair chance of success. They need to know that their fair chance of success and opportunities are being protected and that their efforts will not end up being for not when they are caught in between differential taxation treaties between two different countries.

The legislation before us today will build on Canada's extensive network of income tax treaties. As I mentioned earlier, we have 93 comprehensive tax treaties that are currently in force with countries around the world. Canada's tax treaties are a part of a larger global network of approximately 3,000 tax treaties between nations worldwide. Therefore, we have 93 of 3,000 treaties. We have been doing quite well in ensuring we are protecting Canadians, their investments and efforts abroad.

This network of tax treaties is really fundamental to economic growth, not only for Canada but for many countries. It is fundamental to our trade and investment. At the end of the day, we can talk about companies but we really are talking about people. We are talking about how people are putting their creative efforts into creating economic opportunities through entrepreneurial opportunities that present themselves. This gives them that opportunity to ensure they are fairly taxed and their efforts are protected.

By eliminating double taxation, these treaties provide the certainty which Canadians need to support open and advanced economic opportunities and encourage our friends in our countries, in this case Madagascar, to support open and advanced economies as well. They permit the exchange of information needed to prevent international tax fraud and tax evasion.

From what I have gathered in listening to the speeches presented in the House today and with the support of all major political parties for this treaty and others like it, we are really creating a whole network of opportunity for Canadians to ensure they can take their economic activities abroad. Yes, we want investment here and yes, it is important, but we also have to ensure that we have equipped Canadians with the opportunity to go abroad, to find and create opportunities. This is not only be good for them individually, but also good for Canada in creating more international trade opportunities. I dare say if it is done in the right conditions, there are certainly great economic opportunities for the countries in which we decide to put our entrepreneurial know-how to work.

Bilateral double tax conventions are also fundamental to eliminating tax barriers to trade and investment between two countries. They achieve this purpose in a number of ways.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

First, tax treaties provide greater certainty to taxpayers regarding their potential liability to tax in the other country.

Second, they allocate taxing rights between the two jurisdictions, thus eliminating double taxation.

Third, treaties like this one reduce the risk of burdensome taxation that may arise because of excessive withholding taxes.

Fourth, they ensure that taxpayers will not be subject to discriminatory taxation in the other country.

Fifth, tax treaties authorize the Canada Revenue Agency and its foreign counterpart to exchange tax information for the purpose of preventing tax evasion and tax fraud.

Last, tax treaties give jurisdictions a dispute resolution mechanism.

All of these objectives are important, and this bill will enable us to achieve them.

[*English*]

By updating our tax relationship with Madagascar, we can strengthen trade and investment between our two countries. By doing so, we are showing the world that Canada is an outstanding place to invest and to do business in and, more important, we are creating stability for Canadians to invest and do business outside of our country. We do this because we know that Canada's economic success rests on the hard of Canadians but also on the strong relationships that inform direct investment.

[*Translation*]

I would like to draw the attention of the House to the importance of signing such tax treaties.

Canada has 93 tax treaties with 93 countries around the world. These treaties are part of our government's efforts to ensure Canada's economic well-being. Since budget 2016, our government increased the Canada Revenue Agency's resources and funding in order to strengthen its ability to crack down on tax evasion and tax avoidance. The CRA's compliance programs now help them to better target those posing the highest risk of tax avoidance.

Government Orders

These efforts are producing tangible results for Canadians. Through the new system in place, our government can monitor international electronic funds transfers of \$10,000 or more that enter or leave the country. This represents over one million transactions per month. Monitoring these transfers helps us better assess the risk of individuals and companies committing unfair tax avoidance.

In closing, by increasing the number of tax treaties we have with our partners, the Government of Canada is helping to create favourable conditions for long-term economic growth that will help strengthen Canada's middle class and support those working hard to join it. The bill we are introducing today is an important step towards achieving that goal.

I encourage all my hon. colleagues to support this bill. That concludes my speech. I thank my colleagues for their attention and hope to have the unanimous support of the House to pass this legislation.

• (1300)

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague's speech. The NDP will support Bill S-6. Sadly, however, it includes no provision to combat tax evasion. Its title is misleading. This treaty seeks to avoid double taxation between states; it does not directly address tax evasion.

I have a straightforward question for my colleague. Why do he and his government keep misleading Canadians with a bill like this, which clearly includes no provision to deal with tax evasion?

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question, but I would like to set the record straight. The title of Bill S-6 being discussed today is very clear. It is an act to implement the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income. It is not unlike the bills we adopted to implement the 93 other agreements we concluded with other countries. It features the same measures.

There are indeed measures for avoiding double taxation, but there are also measures meant to reassure the public and to make transactions more transparent. The bill connects the Canada Revenue Agency and Madagascar's agency to ensure that there is no tax evasion by Canadians working in Madagascar or vice versa, by the people of Madagascar working here in Canada.

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell my colleague a bit about transfer pricing. A bilateral treaty like the one my colleague just mentioned requires the parties involved to agree on the fiscal parameters of commercial transfers. This treaty leads to agreements between the two parties and also to information sharing aimed at reducing this type of tax evasion problem.

Besides increasing tax fairness, a bilateral treaty also allows access to more money that can be used quickly, for example, to make necessary investments rather than to be remitted to the public treasury. Furthermore, it creates a bond of trust between two nations. With this agreement, Canada is showing Madagascar that it intends to build relations based on trust and economic growth.

Perhaps my colleague could say a bit more about Canada's intention of contributing in good faith to the economic growth of both parties.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my esteemed colleague from Montarville. He had a wealth of experience with international tax treaties before joining politics. These treaties are designed to ensure that Canadians and other citizens follow the rules and meet their obligations as established by foreign countries and Canada.

My colleague is right to say that this kind of tax treaty is, first and foremost, an obligation that binds both countries. We have great faith in the Canadian system, in the quality of the information and in Canada's tax fairness, and signing a tax treaty with Madagascar would require that country to meet the same standards as Canada. That way, the people of Madagascar and Canada would know that the same information and reports are accepted in both countries. The member is also right to say that this is another way of increasing our ability to ensure tax fairness around the world.

• (1305)

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not think my colleague opposite understood the question asked by my colleague from Jonquière. She was saying that the agreement between Canada and Madagascar is a bilateral double taxation convention. For years, the NDP has been calling on successive Conservative and Liberal governments to review these bilateral conventions and to include statutory rules requiring countries to share tax information to avoid secret banking transactions and tax evasion. That did not happen.

As the member said, we have 93 bilateral conventions, but some of them were signed with tax havens. Our country loses billions of dollars that could be invested in health and education here, in Canada. There are still no statutory tax rules that would allow us to bring that money back.

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. I did indeed understand her question.

This agreement will implement the OECD standard for the exchange of tax information upon request. By signing this agreement with Madagascar, Canada is ensuring that this country will comply with the standards and regulations set by the OECD, an organization recognized around the world for the quality of its tax information exchange agreements. It is quite clear that the international standards were set by the OECD, and I think that addresses the question my two NDP colleagues asked.

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I talk to businesses in my riding of New Brunswick Southwest, I often hear concerns about certainty and predictability in terms of investment, such as where and when they should invest. I wonder if my colleague could speak to the opportunities and the confidence that come from having a fairer playing field for investing for our domestic Canadian businesses when they know that there is a new tax convention in place with Madagascar.

● (1310)

Mr. Greg Fergus: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague from New Brunswick. From the work that she has done with the industries that exist in and around her riding, she certainly knows that it is important for us to establish certainty through these kinds of international standards. We need that level playing field to give confidence to investors to take part in activities. This will not only profit Canadians; we will also be able to profit and share our know-how with people from around the world, and in this case, in Madagascar.

Given the profile of the country and the industries that Canada works in, such as the resource industry, which my hon. friend knows very well and in which she works very hard for her constituents, this type of tax treaty gives an opportunity for us to set the internationally accepted standard. It gives investors confidence that they are not going to be given less than reputable tax treatment. We need to make sure that we set those proper standards so that Canadians know what they are getting into and can share their know-how with the world.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I want to let you know that I will be sharing my time with the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

It is always a privilege to rise in the House and talk about matters of state. That is all the more true today as the end of the parliamentary session draws near. We have just a few weeks to go until the summer recess, and there is going to be an election this fall. With that in mind, I would like to express my support for Bill S-6, an act to implement a tax convention between Madagascar and Canada for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion, as my colleague opposite just explained.

As a number of members have said today, we already have 93 such agreements, some of which were signed by our government before 2015 and all of which are meant to prevent tax evasion. I want to emphasize that tax evasion is a scourge that prevents the government from collecting monies owed, which it uses to provide services to Canadians.

Of course, the important thing is that there be trust between two countries. It is the reason why we are supporting the bill. Trust between the public and the government is equally important, but it has been shaken. It has been shaken because, as we are about to sign an agreement with Madagascar, we have to face the fact that Canada has its own major challenges with tax evasion.

For example, in an article published by the Journal de Montréal, Guillaume St-Pierre said that the Canadian treasury is losing up to

\$3 billion each year in unpaid taxes because wealthy Canadians are hiding money in tax havens.

A Canada Revenue Agency study revealed that Canada is losing significant tax revenue to tax evaders. These people use complex schemes to hide taxable income abroad. The \$3-billion figure could be just the tip of the iceberg. It has been suggested that companies or individuals who evade or avoid taxes could owe as much as \$17 billion in unpaid taxes.

Our system already has certain weaknesses. It is important that Canadians pay their fair share of taxes. This week, we learned that British Columbia also has challenges with money laundering, which is pouring huge amounts of money into B.C.'s real estate market. Several billions of dollars have been injected into the real estate market.

When the time comes to meet a need as fundamental as housing, the average Canadian who pays his taxes must turn to the real estate market, where he is in competition with unknown sources of money.

We support Bill S-6, but the trust between Canadians and the government has been undermined at a time when we are headed towards an election. I would like to remind those listening that, on taxation, which is the issue we are discussing today, the Liberal government looked us in the eye and promised that by now, so in 2019, there would be no deficit because the budget would be balanced.

Why is this important?

● (1315)

It is important to balance the budget, because a period of relative economic prosperity is the perfect time to generate revenue and pay down the deficit so we can get money flowing in the event of an economic crisis, in order to stimulate and support the economy. That is what our Conservative government did.

The difference between what is happening now and what we went through is that we were faced with an economic crisis. The Conservative government did three things: we paid down debt, stimulated the economy in a period of economic crisis and balanced the budget.

The Liberal government's four-year term is almost over, and we have yet to see the government taking any of these measures. In fact, it has done the opposite and plunged us into a bottomless deficit pit.

Writing about the 2019 budget for the Journal de Montréal, Michel Girard mentioned the \$71-billion deficit and called the budget blatant vote buying. He wrote:

True to form, the Trudeau government is spending like there's no tomorrow. That is why, for the fourth time in a row, it's kicking off the new fiscal year with a colossal deficit.

Government Orders

I mentioned trust, and members will recall that we were promised a balanced budget and modest deficits.

Michel Girard goes on to say:

How big will it be this time? Nearly \$20 billion, including a “small” \$3-billion cushion.

Adding it all up, since [this Prime Minister and the Liberals] came to power, they have dug a massive \$71-billion hole with four successive huge deficits.

As a result, [at a time of relative economic prosperity, under the Liberals' watch] the net federal debt has skyrocketed by \$100 billion.

Where is that \$100 billion going? Is it being invested in families, in infrastructure or in the fight against climate change?

Most of the Liberal government's spending is the result of direct program expenses, particularly expenses associated with the federal government's departments, agencies and Crown corporations.

What concrete benefits are there for taxpayers? Most of that \$100-billion deficit goes to the departments. Basically, it goes into bureaucracy, unfortunately.

Direct program expenses have skyrocketed by \$30 billion. Who is footing the bill? Ordinary Canadians are. Since the Liberals came to power in 2015, government revenues have increased by \$43 billion. Money does not grow on trees. The Liberals are taking that money out of taxpayers' pockets, the same taxpayers who have recently been burdened with a carbon tax whose effects are still unknown.

Such is the government's record. It has lost the trust of the people.

It is okay for the government to sign partnerships with Madagascar, as it has done in 93 other cases, but it is not okay for the government to break its word.

I was saying that the Conservatives restored budgetary balance and that we invested during the economic crisis and paid down the debt. The Liberals spend left and right with no real result. I just explained today how this money went to the bureaucracy and taxpayers are the ones paying an extra \$45 billion. Unfortunately, that is not all. This deficit includes measures that taxpayers will not benefit from but will have to pay for. For example, the Parliamentary Budget Officer told us that the government paid \$4.5 billion for a pipeline. Taxpayer money is being used to pay an expense that will not even help Canadian energy access the market at a fair price.

• (1320)

I see that my time is running out. I will simply say that it is important that there be trust between countries, as is the case between Canada and Madagascar in this agreement, but the trust between the Canadian public and the Liberal government has been broken.

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to come back to my colleague's speech about money laundering. I have been interested in this issue since 1995. We need to understand that these longstanding issues involve several authorities over a period of many years.

The report released in Vancouver describes a situation that goes back some time. This bill has been in the works for several years. In the previous government, it seems that my colleague was also the minister of public safety and responsible for these issues because he was responsible for the RCMP.

Why has the problem persisted?

Are we to understand that this is a longstanding problem or that the current reality is the result of cuts they made to the RCMP?

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague. If this was 2015 or early 2016, I would understand why he is asking the question. However, this government has been in power for four years. The Liberals sometimes have the irritating habit of saying that it is not their fault whenever there is a problem.

I encourage my colleague to examine the measures, or rather the lack of measures, that were taken over the past four years to address the problems of tax evasion and money laundering.

Some economists are even saying that if we did not consider the effect of this injection of money into the Canadian economy, we could even find ourselves in a recession. Therefore, it is important to act responsibly together with the provincial governments and our international partners.

One of these measures would be to strengthen the regulatory system for real estate agents to deal with money laundered in the real estate market, which I mentioned in my speech.

[*English*]

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the investment made in my riding, New Brunswick Southwest, was responsible investment. In rural communities, it takes a lot to get applications in, so I differ on that sentiment.

I recall very vividly the all-night voting, and I wonder if my hon. colleague could tell us why the opposition voted against any increases to the RCMP that night when, during his speech today, he talked about the importance of the RCMP being able to investigate.

• (1325)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. I actually had the opportunity to meet at the very beginning of this parliamentary session.

In the last budget, the Conservative government increased funding for the RCMP to combat terrorism, among other things. The RCMP naturally has to have access to the tools it needs to keep Canadians safe.

I would like to refer my colleague to the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report on investments in infrastructure. In his update on investments in the territories, the Parliamentary Budget Officer noted that there is no infrastructure money to be seen. One concrete example is that the City of Lévis was forced to invest in its pool project with a grant from the provincial government alone. The federal government did not step up. The same thing happened with the construction of an overpass.

Government Orders

Where is federal money going? We are not seeing it in infrastructure back home—

The Deputy Speaker: I apologize for interrupting the hon. member, but the interpretation is not working.

Is it working now? Okay.

There is one minute and a half remaining for another question or comment.

There are none. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak about Bill S-6, an act to implement the Convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income.

There seem to be good measures found in this bill, especially on double taxation. This bill contains provisions for tax in both Madagascar and Canada.

In the case of Madagascar, double taxation shall be avoided as follows:

(a) where a resident of a Madagascar derives income which, in accordance with the provisions of this Convention, may be taxed in Canada, Madagascar shall allow as a deduction from the tax on the income of that resident, an amount equal to the income tax paid in Canada. Such deduction shall not, however, exceed that part of the income tax, as computed before the deduction is given, which is attributable to the income which may be taxed in Canada.

It is great to see the government is making a move that might keep more of people's money in their own pockets instead of going toward paying for the government's reckless spending. It is also good to see the government is concerned about double taxation. It is just a shame that it is only concerned about it when it is happening in the Republic of Madagascar and not here in Canada.

Would it not be great if the government made such an effort to avoid double-taxing Canadians? However, the government is doing exactly that with its carbon tax on everything. The Prime Minister is charging GST on top of that carbon tax. I would say that is a tax on a tax. That is just it. The government does not particularly care about the average Canadian, and especially rural Canadians, such as those in my riding of Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

When the carbon tax took effect, it immediately raised the price of everything, from gas to home heating to groceries. Canadians are being taxed twice for living the life of luxury by heating their home and driving to work or driving their children to soccer or dance, or even driving to the doctor.

If the carbon tax were actually an environmental plan, would it not be logical that the great emitters of pollution in this country would pay most of this tax? They are not. Canada's biggest emitters are exempt from the carbon tax, while small business owners, commuters, hockey moms and dads, and farmers are expected to take public transit. That is not possible for many rural Canadians.

The Prime Minister expects rural Canadians to just hop onto public transit or buy a new Tesla. That does not jive with what is

happening across Canada, and certainly not in my riding of Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes. It does show how disconnected the Prime Minister really is with average Canadians. Average Canadians, at least half of them, are \$200 away from insolvency, but they had better rush out and buy that new Tesla.

We have amazing farmers in my riding, and it would be great if this bill protected them from double taxation, but it does not. They are hit by the carbon tax and the GST on top of that.

The farmers in my riding are some of the greatest stewards of the land that we have in this country. They have long been at the forefront of sustainability and innovation. The way farmers have incorporated new technologies like biofuel and robotics into their operations is very interesting. The prevalence of the use of biogas and biofuel on today's farms is particularly noteworthy. Biogas is methane that is produced with the use of anaerobic digesters on the farm. Usually manure and leftover waste like corn stalks and husks are introduced into the anaerobic digester to create methane for use on the farm; then the solid byproduct of the methane production can be used as fertilizer.

Cavendish Farms, a large potato processing operation with plants in Alberta, Ontario and the Maritimes, has reduced emissions by 50% over the last decade through the use of biogas, not because they were forced to by a nonsensical carbon tax on everything but because it made good business sense and because it was the right thing to do.

In addition to that, biodiesel can be created on the farm through high-energy waste such as vegetable oil. We know that most of the machinery on the farm will run on diesel. If farmers can meet some 20% of their diesel needs by creating biodiesel, then they are reducing emissions and helping their bottom line at the same time.

● (1330)

These investments in sustainability and innovation have occurred because it makes good sense for farmers, their families and businesses, not because they were threatened with taxes.

Now the Prime Minister's carbon tax is raising the cost of bringing crops to market, buying fertilizer and drying grain, which causes margins to shrink, and farmers cannot afford new investments in innovation when they are worried about that bottom line. The question still stands as to why the government is concerned with people abroad keeping more money in their pockets while it neglects people at home. The answer is clear: The Prime Minister simply needs the revenue to pay for his reckless spending, which will be paid for on the backs of everyday Canadians.

Government Orders

This reckless spending has come with massive deficit after massive deficit, the latest of which came in the form of the 2019 cover-up budget. In the midst of the SNC-Lavalin scandal, the Prime Minister must have sat down with the Minister of Finance to make a plan to distract Canadians from the corruption and contempt the Liberals have shown for the judicial system, which they continue to demonstrate, so the Liberals announced a budget with a \$20-billion deficit and \$41 billion in new distraction-spending.

We saw a large corporation, with the clock ticking, launch a full-court press lobbying campaign. The corporation got the Prime Minister's top advisers and top government officials on board. Then we saw a former attorney general who respected the rule of law and would not cave to pressure from the PMO. Then there was a convenient cabinet shuffle that saw the attorney general fired and replaced with a Montreal MP from right next door to SNC-Lavalin, one who was willing to support the government's disregard for the rule of law.

Knowing the trial of Vice-Admiral Mark Norman was soon to be in court, the Liberals released this cover-up budget. It is clear the Prime Minister was trying to cover his tracks with this budget. There is overwhelming evidence that the Liberals politically interfered in this case and tried to destroy a decorated military officer, the vice-chief of the defence staff, Vice-Admiral Mark Norman. The prosecution made clear that the documents the Prime Minister and the Liberals were fighting to keep secret were the very documents that caused the charges to be dropped. This fact strongly suggests the government was deliberately withholding and suppressing documents to prolong the politically motivated attack on the vice-admiral.

From withholding documents that would have exonerated the vice-admiral to using code names in emails to having government lawyers coach witnesses, the interference and the lengths to which the government was willing to go were very clear. It is no wonder the government needed to rack up record spending and record deficits to distract Canadians.

If my memory serves me correctly, 2019 was supposed to be the year the budget would balance itself, like so many babies on the campaign tour that the Prime Minister is now on. In 2015 he said, "I am looking straight at Canadians and being honest the way I always have. We said we are committed to balanced budgets, and we are. We will balance that budget in 2019...."

That could not be further from the truth. The free-spending Prime Minister's and finance minister's own finance department documents show the budget will not be balanced until 2040. What they are engaged in is nothing short of intergenerational theft.

It is shameful. The government spent \$50 million to impress a celebrity on Twitter, gave \$10.5 million to a convicted terrorist who murdered U.S. Army Sergeant Chris Speer, and the Prime Minister is willing to raise taxes on everyday Canadians to pay for it.

While Bill S-6, an act to create a tax convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the purpose of avoiding double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to income taxes is a solid measure, the real issue is that the government has neglected to take the same measures on double taxation here at home. Canadians should not have to pay for the Prime Minister's

reckless spending through raised taxes and double taxation for generations to come.

The Prime Minister advertised that he would balance the budget in 2019. As Canadians have learned over the last three and a half years, the current Prime Minister is just not as advertised.

• (1335)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member across the way is so wrong in so many ways.

If we want to talk about advertising significant things we have done, we could look at trade treaties and tax agreements. These are all important to Canada and to our economy. Our government has set a record in three and a half years with the creation of over one million new jobs for Canadians. This is a direct result of the types of policies that we have put in place.

The Tories are in wonder-land. They have no idea what they are going to do about Canada's environment. They know they want to criticize the Liberal government, but they have absolutely no idea of what the environment should look like in the future. There is no plan, as my colleague says. They are the no-plan party.

When can we anticipate the Conservative Party sharing its plan for the environment with the rest of Canada?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, there is so much there to talk about.

As the Leader of the Opposition has said, we will release our environmental plan before the end of June as part of his announcements on his vision and our vision for Canada.

Our environmental plan will be just that, a plan to help the environment. Unlike the tax-and-spend Liberals, we will not dress up a tax and call it a plan. What they are doing to Canadians is shameful. They are trying to balance the books on the backs of hard-working Canadians.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes for his passion since he has entered the House of Commons. I really appreciate his enthusiasm.

The member talked in his speech about ways to tackle climate change in his own riding, and I am really grateful to him for that. He said businesses in his community are taking action.

Conservative members have raised concerns over the carbon tax in 2,100 interventions and there have been over 762 questions in the House of Commons against the carbon tax, so it is refreshing to hear that member talk about solutions. Those were lost opportunities. Those 2,100 interventions and 762 questions could have been pressing the government with solutions. I really am excited to hear about their plan.

Government Orders

Let me get back to Bill S-6, the bill that we are talking about today and a bill we all agree with.

A bigger problem in this country is tax avoidance. Billions of dollars are leaving this country, a country where hard-working people are paying their fair share and where large corporations, the elite and those at the top are not. Would the member agree that we should be making legislative and regulatory changes to prevent that from happening?

• (1340)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, it is important for everyone to pay their fair share. Although the government campaigned on a promise to do things differently, it turned around and cut millions of dollars in cheques to billionaires. That is not the right thing to do. The Liberals have not done the heavy lifting when it comes to enforcement on tax evasion, and it is important that they signal that they are serious about that issue. Certainly we are serious about making sure that people pay their fair share.

What is most important is that Canadians who are within \$200 of insolvency do not get hammered by the Liberal government by regressive taxes on the consumption of everything.

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to speak to Bill S-6. I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria.

Bill S-6 proposes measures that would make the tax system fairer by addressing aggressive international tax avoidance.

To have an economy that works for everyone, we need a tax system that is fair, and we need all Canadians to pay their fair share. A fair tax system instils confidence and helps create opportunities for everyone. That is why, as one of our first measures upon coming into office, we introduced a middle-class tax cut. Single individuals who benefit from this middle-class tax cut are saving, on average, \$330 per year. Couples are saving, on average, \$540 per year.

We are providing simpler, more generous and better-targeted support for Canadian families who need it the most: the Canada child benefit or the CCB. As a result of the CCB, nine out of 10 Canadian families with children are better off than they were under the previous system of child benefits. On average, families benefiting from the Canada child benefit are getting \$6,800 this year, to help pay for things like healthy food, back-to-school clothes and new winter boots for growing kids. Since its introduction, the CCB has lifted approximately 300,000 children out of poverty.

Mr. Ken McDonald: Say that again.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member from Newfoundland and Labrador, and it should be said again: 300,000 children lifted out of poverty. That is an incredible accomplishment.

The government cut the small business tax rate from 10.5% to 10%, effective last January. As of January 2019, though, this rate was further reduced to 9%. For the average small business, this will leave an additional \$1,600 per year to reinvest in the business and create better, well-paying jobs.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, we have heard the member speak for a few minutes now and he has not said

anything that is relevant to this bill. I am asking if he could get back to the bill that is at hand here.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Courtenay—Alberni for his intervention and his point of order. He is right that relevance, of course, is one of the limits on speech in the House. The member for Courtenay—Alberni already indicated that we are just a few minutes in. I must say that I was preoccupied here momentarily with a brief conversation with one of the clerks. Therefore, I will endeavour to pay close attention to what the hon. member for St. Catharines has to say, and I am certain that he will bring the speech right back to the subject that is before the House.

The hon. member for St. Catharines.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in the introduction, the thrust of my speech is about tax fairness, as Bill S-6 is about tax fairness, and talking about the other measures the government has taken with respect to tax fairness. I am happy to continue and bring it back again.

Next year, the combined federal-provincial-territorial average tax rate for small businesses will be lowered to 12.2%, by far the lowest in the G7 and the fourth lowest among OECD countries.

However, tax fairness requires action on multiple fronts, not just Bill S-6.

For example, in each of our budgets we have taken steps to strengthen the Canada Revenue Agency's ability to crack down on tax evasion and combat tax avoidance. I know those are issues that have been discussed by the opposition members in questions they have brought up.

The government has also taken action to close loopholes that result in unfair tax advantages for some at the expense of others. Actions like these help ensure the government's ongoing ability to support the programs and services on which Canadians rely.

Today's legislation, Bill S-6, targets strategies used by businesses and wealthy individuals to exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules to inappropriately reduce or avoid tax. Bill S-6 greatly enhances our ability to counter tax avoidance strategies that would otherwise abuse Canada's tax treaties and reduce or avoid Canadian tax.

While we have made significant investments in the CRA, we know that fighting tax avoidance is not something that we can do alone. It is not easy work. Bill S-6 implements a multilateral convention that contains a number of treaty-related measures to combat base erosion and profit shifting, or BEPS. BEPS refers to tax avoidance strategies in which businesses and wealthy individuals can use gaps and mismatches in tax rules to avoid tax or shift profits to low-tax or no-tax locations. In other words, these strategies enable businesses and wealthy individuals to avoid paying their full or fair share of taxes.

Government Orders

To implement all these measures in a timely and effective manner, a new approach was required. This new approach is the multilateral convention contained in the bill, ultimately known as the multilateral instrument, or MLI. The MLI is a product of a global initiative, working with more than 100 countries and jurisdictions, including Canada. The purpose of the MLI is to allow participating jurisdictions to adopt measures to combat BEPS without having to individually renegotiate their existing tax treaties. The MLI would also improve the functioning of international tax systems by including measures designed to better facilitate the timely and effective resolution of disputes under tax treaties.

We have listened to Canadians. They want the government to take action to address tax avoidance, and we are committed to that. We are making significant progress.

The bill builds on the government's ongoing work to ensure that we have a tax system that is fair for everyone. Starting with budget 2016, the government has been giving additional funds to the Canada Revenue Agency, so that it can more effectively crack down on tax evasion and combat aggressive tax avoidance. These additional investments continued in 2017, and again in 2018, and they are already paying dividends.

At the close of 2017-18, CRA had 50 ongoing criminal investigations related to the transfer of money that rightfully belongs in Canadian coffers to low- or no-tax jurisdictions. The government is also targeting those who promote tax avoidance schemes and has imposed more than \$44 million in fines on those third parties.

We are joining this international collaboration in making these investments in the CRA because Canadians want their money back and want the loopholes through which these tax dollars flow out of Canada closed. If our economy does not work for everyone, if people do not pay their fair share, Canadians grow concerned and they want action.

We invested in the CRA, after years of cuts under the Harper government. Of course, it limited the CRA's ability to prosecute tax offences. We need to fund those who are on the ground. They are essentially police officers, and we saw today in Ontario, during Ontario Police Week, the provincial government cutting \$46 million to front-line policing and the OPP.

● (1345)

We are doing the opposite. When we see criminal or illegal activity, in this case tax avoidance, we need to step up and take action. That is why we invested in the CRA. That is why we are putting more officials on the ground. This is not easy work.

Through my legal practice, I know that dealing with cases of fraud and white-collar crime is a very difficult burden for investigative agencies like the CRA. It is not a matter of seeing something on camera or hearing from an eyewitness. It takes a great deal of work to bring forward cases for enforcement and prosecution.

In the absence of investment, there will be a decline, and it will be easier for Canadians to avoid taxation and move their money overseas without fear of getting caught. This needs to be emphasized. The tax system needs to be seen to be fair. Justice should not only be done; it should be seen to be done.

This has been an important part of our investments in the CRA, ensuring that we have a tax system working for every man, woman and child in this country. That is money that needs to work for Canadians, including through some of the tax programs I talked about. It is about making our entire tax system fairer.

We talked about the CCB making the system fairer. I had a wonderful conversation with a constituent who is no longer receiving the CCB. She was able to use the CCB to start up her small business. There is more money in her pockets, tax-free. The opposition voted against this, but she received this benefit and was able to start up her business. She is now making enough money that she no longer receives the CCB. She is employing Canadians. She was able to take the step to help herself and better our community, and that is significant.

Coming back to the middle-class tax cut, I note that one of the first things we did as a government was lower taxes on the middle class and raise them on the wealthiest 1%. Again, it is about a tax system that works for everyone. We were shocked that the opposition voted against this, but it is a measure that Canadians wanted. They wanted to ensure that the wealthiest in our society paid a little more so those who make a little less could get a bit of a break, so that is what we did.

The previous speaker, the hon. member from eastern Ontario, said that families are not better off under our government. Nothing could be further from the truth. The average family is \$2,000 better off—

● (1350)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I believe you made a ruling about relevance a little earlier. I know we always allow great discretion, but the member is not really debating the topic at hand. A laundry list of what he considers to be the government's domestic accomplishments has nothing to do with this debate. I know members are given a lot of latitude, but I wonder if that latitude has been stretched.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo for her intervention and her reminder.

The hon. member indicated that he was arranging his remarks around a comparison, and it is through that comparison that he was able to venture into the subject area he was discussing.

We are almost out of time. I will give the hon. member 30 seconds to finish his remarks, and then we will move to questions and comments.

Statements by Members

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that a Conservative member rose on a point of order for relevance, because I was directly addressing the previous Conservative speaker's comments. Maybe what he was talking about was completely out of order and we are both in the wrong.

To go back to my earlier remarks, the average family is \$2,000 better off. The Conservatives will cite the Fraser Institute and will ignore the Canada child benefit, and that is their right; they can go on misleading Canadians. However, average Canadians are seeing more money in their pockets, for a tax system that is fairer, a tax system that is better and a tax system that works for everyone.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for not talking about Madagascar, which is the point of this whole debate. It is very ironic that the government would bring a bill forward to talk about our relationship with Madagascar.

Where does that fit in the priority compared to the relationship the government has ruined with China, Japan, India, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia and the U.S.? Could the member comment on that?

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, I did address the bill on multiple occasions. Perhaps the member was chatting with her neighbour, which is fine.

The government is committed to a fair tax system. This is part of that. Working within our international obligations, this is an important step forward. We hope at the end of the day the opposition agrees, looks to move forward on this tax treaty, supports it and sees it become law.

• (1355)

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, members heard earlier my earlier concerns that the member's speech was basically about the Liberal platform moving forward and that it was not germane to the bill before us, which is a bill about tax fairness. We agree that Madagascar has a similar tax system to Canada.

However, the government could have taken this opportunity to put forward legislative and regulatory changes that could have closed tax loopholes, which are costing Canadians billions and billions of dollars. Instead, the government comes forward with a bill like this, at the end of a session.

We have learned from the solicitor general in British Columbia that over \$5 billion had been washed in B.C., which is now considering holding a public inquiry into this. If the Province of British Columbia decides to move forward with a public inquiry into tax evasion and the amount of money that has been used as shelters for housing and various different things, will the Government of Canada follow suit? Billions of dollars are at stake.

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the irony of the hon. member questioning the relevancy of my speech by asking a question for something not directly related to this topic either.

We are always happy to discuss issues with our provincial and territorial counterparts. Money laundering is already illegal and is a concern. It has been going on for a very long time. If there are opportunities for discussions and working together on that, I think

Canadians would want the federal government and the province to work together on it.

Looking at differences between governments for enforcement, such as the RCMP and the CRA, which would be called upon to enforce those measures, the previous government made cuts to those agencies. We have invested in the RCMP and the CRA so we can better address the problems, as well as make the tax system seem fair and work for everyone.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things we have seen over the three and a half years is a government that has looked outside of Canada's boundaries. In dealing with tax treaties and trade agreements, we are allowing and fostering more trade and opportunities for Canada's middle class and those aspiring to be a part of it. In good part, the trade file is one of the reasons we have been able to achieve hitting one million new jobs in Canada in the last three and a half years. I wonder if my colleague can provide his thoughts on just how important that fact is?

Mr. Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more with the hon. parliamentary secretary and his comments. A million new jobs is something to brag about. It is significant. Canadians have worked very hard and it is clear our policies have worked to help fuel that innovation and entrepreneurship. Part of that is our trade strategy, whether it is with Europe, Asia, or standing up to the United States or by standing firm on our commitments and with our industries.

Canada has unprecedented access to global markets. That speaks well to the economy. Bill S-6 is a small part of that and it will move us forward. We are always looking forward to creating new jobs and helping Canadians in their entrepreneurship and in investing.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[Translation]

ALCOHOLIC ENERGY DRINKS

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on February 26, 2018, a 14-year-old girl died after drinking FCKD UP, an alcoholic energy drink.

Despite this tragedy, the government still does not seem to understand that it needs to take decisive action to make sure it never happens again. Instead of listening to recommendations from Éduc'alcool, which has not been able to get a meeting with the Minister of Health, the Liberals have been cozying up to Geloso Group, the company that produces FCKD UP.

Statements by Members

More than 100 communications between Geloso Group lobbyists and senior government officials, including the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister's Office, were registered during the period from April 2018 to March 2019. A young girl's death should have been a warning. The risks these drinks pose to our young people cannot be taken lightly. Éduc'alcool has been trying to warn us for years, but the government unfortunately seems to prefer hearing from the makers of FCKD UP.

* * *

• (1400)

[English]

JEAN VANIER

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the world lost a great Canadian, Jean Vanier.

Born to privilege, this erudite intellectual and social visionary pursued the simple idea that we are all made in the image of God, that we have “unique value”, especially those among us who have been discarded by society. He lived what he believed.

The origins of the worldwide l'Arche movement were in a modest home with two intellectually challenged adults. Now there are 147 communities around the world, 31 of which are in Canada.

Tens of thousands of Canadians have spent time in a l'Arche community, sometimes called “a university for the heart”, among those who society has treated as discards and have learned lessons that have influenced their life paths in profound ways.

Jean Vanier used his formidable gifts to follow the teachings of Jesus. His life was a road less travelled, his influence, both temporal and eternal. It was a life well lived.

* * *

PRINCE ALBERT RAIDERS

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in front of a roaring sellout crowd at the Art Hauser Centre, Dante Hannoun scored the overtime winning goal in game seven last night as the Prince Albert Raiders defeated the Vancouver Giants to become the WHL champions. This is the first WHL title for the Raiders in 34 years.

Raider Goalie Ian Scott was named WHL MVP. His playoff run included 16 wins, five shutouts and a 1.96 goals against average. Now the focus is on Halifax and the Memorial Cup.

A very big thanks to the Prince Albert Raiders and the Vancouver Giants hockey clubs for a very exciting WHL final.

On behalf of my constituents, I want the players and coaches to know that we will be loudly cheering them on and wishing them the best of luck as they begin the Memorial Cup tournament in Halifax on Friday. Go, Raiders, go.

* * *

OAKVILLE BLADES

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of every hockey season, in rinks across the country, Junior A hockey players lace up their skates and compete

for a chance to win the RBC Cup. From over 130 teams who began the season, only five remain. One of those teams is my Oakville Blades.

Fans of the Blades know that this year has been a special one. The season started off with a streak that saw the Blades win 18 of 19, catapulting them to first place. Backstopped by league leading goaltender Will Barber and led on the offensive end by Spencer Kersten, the Blades made quick work of their regional competition, sweeping the Buckland Cup and then capturing the Dudley-Hewitt Cup.

The Blades now find themselves in Brooks, Alberta, competing for the national championship. As the tournament heats up, there is only one thing left to say: Go, Blades, go.

* * *

[Translation]

REGIONAL FARM BUSINESS

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge an operation that began over 50 years ago and is now a prime agri-tourism destination in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean.

The Ferme Michel Rivard et fille, in Saint-Ambroise, stands apart from other regional producers by providing innovative, top-quality products. The farm's reputation is not based on its production volume, but on the quality of its products. For example, blueberries are hand-picked to get only the most delicious flavours the land has to offer. The farm's excellence and hard work were recently rewarded with a nomination for best tourism business at the Gala du mérite économique and best contribution to regional tourism at the Gala des prix agroalimentaires.

I invite all my colleagues in the House of Commons and Canadians everywhere to come down to the farm for a one-of-a-kind experience. Come taste their blueberry poutine, explore the countryside and meet the owners, Nathalie and Pascal, who will gladly show you around the farm.

* * *

FLOODING IN MARC-AURÈLE-FORTIN

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we recently had the opportunity to welcome the Minister of National Defence in Laval. He came not only to examine the damage caused by the flooding, but also to thank the reservists of the 4th Battalion of the Royal 22nd Regiment of the Canadian Armed Forces.

We can never emphasize enough that these reservists, who come from all walks of life, are true citizen soldiers. I want to acknowledge their service and hard work these past few weeks and thank them for ensuring the success of the efforts to limit the damage done by these historic floods, which have impacted many families in Laval.

Statements by Members

●(1405)

*[English]***JIM HAWKES**

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to acknowledge the passing of a former member of Parliament for the riding of Calgary West, Jim Hawkes. Mr. Hawkes, or Jim, as he preferred to be called, was a member of this chamber from 1979 to 1993, winning, I believe, six elections. He served in a variety of capacities, including as chair of the former standing committee on employment and immigration, parliamentary secretary to the deputy prime minister at the time, Don Mazankowski, and chief government whip from 1988 to 1993.

As the current member for Calgary Signal Hill, which will revert to Calgary West in October, I can attest that even 25 years after leaving office, Jim was recognized and well known throughout the community. He was respected by the people he served. He was an honest, decent, fair man, and he worked tirelessly for the constituents of Calgary West.

Jim Hawkes was a true gentleman, and he will be sorely missed.

* * *

*[Translation]***PASCAL CLOUTIER**

Mr. Richard Hébert (Lac-Saint-Jean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Forest Products Association of Canada presented Pascal Cloutier, mayor of Dolbeau-Mistassini, with the forest community champion award at its annual dinner in Vancouver. This award is presented to leaders who demonstrate support for the forestry sector and its contributions to Canada's environmental and economic priorities.

Pascal's rich career includes work as a millwright at the Dolbeau-Mistassini paper mill, as the president of the plant's labour union, as the president of the Alliance forêt boréale and as mayor. He is known for his commitment to finding solutions that address the interests of his community and region. He has shown remarkable dedication to promoting the sustainable harvesting of the boreal forest and defending forestry communities. It is a privilege to work with him on a daily basis in the interests of the people of Lac-Saint-Jean and Quebec.

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*[English]***PROJECT RAMADAN**

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Liberal government promised to reduce poverty, and since 2015, 825,000 Canadians have been lifted out of poverty, reducing the rate by over 20%, but until we fully eradicate poverty, we appreciate and support the hard work done by grassroots organizations to support Canadians in need. One such organization is the Muslim Welfare Centre, which brings local communities together to build baskets of food to be delivered to families. Project Ramadan not only feeds over 6000 families for a month but also reinforces the spirit of the holy month of Ramadan with generosity, empathy and community.

I would like to thank the Muslim Welfare Centre and the hundreds of volunteers who dedicate their time to spread good will among Canadians. We look forward to meeting the Project Ramadan team on the Hill on June 18 and to reinforcing our commitment to reducing poverty in Canada.

* * *

CLIMATE CHANGE

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, promises, promises, promises. The Prime Minister was elected based on a host of empty promises, including tiny deficits and balanced budgets. Remember that? All promises made were quickly broken, with the biggest whopper of them all being a promise to fight climate change by reducing greenhouse gases under the Paris Agreement. How is that working out? While the environment minister claims that Canada is on track to meet its Paris targets, there is overwhelming evidence that we are going to miss those targets by a country mile. The environment commissioner, the Auditor General, the UN and even David Suzuki say that Canada will not meet its targets. Even the government's own documents show that Canada's emissions gap is growing every single year.

The Liberals do not have an environment plan. They have a tax plan. As for the promise to fight climate change, it is not as advertised.

* * *

●(1410)

*[Translation]***HIGHWAY PROJECT NORTH OF MONTREAL**

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I never gave up, and now, it is with confidence, passion, determination and strength that I stand before you today to say that Highway 19 has received historic support from our government.

This week, our government made an investment of nearly 50% so that this long-awaited highway can finally become a reality. This \$260-million contribution was a windfall. In 2015, I made a promise that would greatly improve the quality of life of my constituents. Today, I can proudly say that we have kept that promise. People are getting a lot more than they hoped for thanks to the hard work of all the key players on this file.

Residents of Thérèse-De Blainville, Laval and the Lower Laurentians, let's celebrate this good news. Your government is on your side.

* * *

*[English]***CANADA CHILD BENEFIT**

Hon. Kent Hehr (Calgary Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe that whether a child is born of a rich family or one that struggles, that child deserves every opportunity to build his or her life. That is precisely what the Canada child benefit is accomplishing. The CCB is making significant impacts on lives across this country. In Calgary, there are over 100,000 families receiving this benefit.

Statements by Members

I recently spoke with Melanie. Melanie has three children. The Canada child benefit has helped her to find stable housing and to purchase groceries and school supplies. The CCB is making a real difference in her life. There are many more Melanies in my constituency.

The good news is that since 2015, we have cut child poverty in Alberta by 50%. However, more needs to be done. That is why we are increasing the CCB this summer and helping more families find more success.

* * *

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2015, this Prime Minister promised to run three small deficits. Four years later, he is tens of billions of dollars deeper into the red ink. Promise made, promise broken.

This Prime Minister promised to do politics differently, but his government has proven itself to be corrupt and unethical, with its cash for access scandal, the SNC-Lavalin scandal and now the Mark Norman affair. Promise made, promise broken.

This Prime Minister promised to restore Canada's image on the world stage. Four years later, after embarrassing Canadians over and over again, our credibility and trade reputation are in shambles. Promise made, promise broken.

Canada needs a real leader. On October 21, Canadians will have the chance to show this Prime Minister the cost of his broken promises, because Canadians know that this Prime Minister is not as advertised.

* * *

[Translation]

HAUTE-YAMASKA SUICIDE PREVENTION CENTRE

Mr. Pierre Breton (Shefford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, suicide is a sad reality in our society. Fortunately there are people who work hard to prevent suicide and to help these people and their loved ones.

I want to commend the members of the team at the Centre de prévention du suicide de la Haute-Yamaska for their dedication. This caring centre is celebrating its 35th anniversary this year. It does everything possible to provide prevention and intervention services, in addition to follow-up care. The centre helps more than 800 people in distress and makes more than 5,000 interventions every year. With the organization's help, as well as that of the networks of public and community organizations, the number of suicides in our region has dropped since 2015.

Thank you and congratulations to the Centre de prévention du suicide de la Haute-Yamaska. Your involvement and support play a vital role in restoring hope to people going through difficult times.

* * *

[English]

DAVID KAMPE

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Penticton lost a pillar of the community last Wednesday when David Kampe passed away. Mr. Kampe owned

one of the largest construction firms in the Okanagan Valley and was a community builder, in that sense, for over 35 years. However, it was his quiet philanthropy that really had an impact. He donated millions of dollars to help create a new hospital tower in Penticton, a beautiful facility that opened just weeks before his passing. He and his company were one of the main supporters of the Penticton Peach Festival, the largest free family community festival in Canada.

Mr. Kampe really built a solid foundation for the future of his community through his generous giving to the Penticton Secondary School Bursary and Scholarship Foundation. Last year he donated almost \$200,000 to that cause, essentially doubling the foundation's ability to support students in their quest for post-secondary education.

I thank David Kampe. *Lim'limpt*. His legacy will always be remembered.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is currently at war with Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, British Columbia and Quebec on several fronts. Not only is the government interfering and refusing to stay within its jurisdiction, but it also lacks respect for our valued provincial partners. Yesterday's provincial-federal infrastructure announcement without Quebec is another example of this.

Quebeckers have had enough of these squabbles and conflicts and of the condescending attitude of the Liberal government and the Prime Minister. Canadians and Quebeckers deserve better. They deserve to be treated with respect. A Conservative government, which has always respected its partners, is the only one that can help them achieve their goals. In five months, on October 21, we will give Canadians a real government that will—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Malpeque.

* * *

[English]

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everywhere Canadians look, things are growing, but not just spring flowers. Canada's workforce grew by a record-smashing 106,000 jobs in April, bringing the number of jobs created since we formed government to over one million. This did not happen by accident. Our government put forward a plan in 2015, and we are seeing the rewards for Canadians.

First, we cut taxes. Middle-class Canadians now pay less income tax than they did under Stephen Harper. Canadian small businesses now enjoy the lowest tax rate in the G7.

We chose to invest in infrastructure and innovation, in science and R and D and in our primary industries. The fall economic statement gave business a competitive advantage. The Canada child benefit helps families raising children and distributes that money to the community.

We are on the right track. Commitments our government made in 2015 are bearing fruit, as advertised.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

JUSTICE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has finally decided to answer some questions on the Mark Norman affair. He has had plenty of time to rehearse the script and memorize the lines, and I have no doubt that he is going to talk about the specific decision to stay the charges against Mark Norman being free from political interference. However, what I would like to know is about all the evidence of other interference in this case, including his government going to great lengths to block documents from being presented to court.

Why did the government go to such efforts to prevent the truth from coming out?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember where this file started. On the eve of the 2015 election, Conservatives decided to rush through a half-billion-dollar, sole-sourced project. We wanted to ensure that we did our own due diligence on this decision with the new federal cabinet. That is exactly what we did.

In regard to documents, the government met all of its obligations with respect to the third party records applications. The PMO provided all documents that responded to the subpoenas directly to the Privy Council Office, which determined the relevancy and suggested redactions. This was all subject to approval—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government went to great lengths to block those documents from coming to court. There are many occasions when this government proved it was going to great lengths to prevent the truth from coming out, including coaching witnesses and departmental officials and using code words to avoid access-to-information laws.

Does the Prime Minister believe that this is normal behaviour for a government when a decorated vice-admiral is fighting for his career, his reputation and his personal freedom?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, the decision to suspend Vice-Admiral Norman was taken independently by the chief of defence staff. Any

Oral Questions

accusations otherwise are simply absurd. We fully respect the independence of the processes in place.

Again, on the documents, the government met all of its obligations with respect to third party records applications. The PMO provided all documents that responded to the subpoenas directly to the Privy Council Office, which determined relevancy and suggested redactions, subject to approval by the judge.

• (1420)

[Translation]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in his attempt to take a contract away from the Davie shipyard, the Prime Minister deliberately tarnished Vice-Admiral Norman's reputation. Even though 73 people were aware of what was going on, the only name he sent to the RCMP was Mark Norman's. The Prime Minister also said there would be a trial before that was actually the case.

Will the Prime Minister do the right thing and apologize to Vice-Admiral Norman?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember where this all started.

On the eve of the 2015 election, the Conservatives decided to rush through a half-billion-dollar sole-sourced contract. We wanted to ensure that we did our own due diligence on this decision with the new federal cabinet. That is what we did, and it is what any government should to. The decision to suspend Vice-Admiral Norman was taken independently by the chief of defence staff.

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again the Prime Minister is acting as if the justice system is there to reward his friends and punish his enemies. They spent years trying to fight the release of those documents in court. There are serious allegations that need to be investigated about coaching witnesses and using code names to get around access-to-information laws.

Will the Prime Minister allow the defence committee to investigate these serious allegations, or will he pull a page right out of the SNC-Lavalin playbook and use his power to shut it down?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we understand that committees operate independently and make their own decisions about how to proceed.

This is yet again another example of the Conservatives wanting to talk about anything other than the economy, anything other than our budget, anything other than what we have been doing to help create jobs for Canadians, to lift 825,000 Canadians out of poverty, bring in the lowest unemployment in 40 years and keep doing the things for the middle class that Canadians elected us to do.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order. I am afraid I have to remind the member for Calgary Signal Hill not to yell throughout when someone else is speaking. We speak one at a time, and now it is the hon. Leader of the Opposition who has a turn.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister gave \$10.5 million to Omar Khadr, a convicted terrorist, so that he would not have to fight him in court, but when it comes to a decorated naval officer who has put his career into making Canadians safe, the Prime Minister spared no expense fighting him in court. Why the double standard?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we respect the judiciary. We respect our independent judicial process. We will not stoop to the kinds of petty and, quite frankly, distasteful political games the members opposite are engaged in right now. They are so desperate to not talk about the economic numbers, the job growth, the impact on Canadians—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise. Members ought to have respect for the notion that one member at a time should be speaking, which is the member who has the floor and was recognized.

The Right Honourable Prime Minister has the floor.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, once again we see the Conservatives stuck, not being able to do anything but sling mud, because a million Canadians have new jobs, because the Canadian economy is going well.

We lowered unemployment to record levels. We are continuing to work for the middle class—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby South.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people across the country count on their government to present a climate change strategy that makes reconciliation a priority, sets ambitious targets, takes real action to reduce emissions and invests in clean energy.

The government needs to have the courage to act, while creating good jobs and making life more affordable for Canadians.

Will the Prime Minister adopt the NDP's plan to really fight climate change?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): What is the NDP's plan exactly, Mr. Speaker? Their plan changes every day. We have always said that we need to protect the environment while growing the economy.

Yesterday, the NDP leader did a complete 180 on the LNG Canada project. Now, he is opposed to the biggest private investment in the history of Canada, a project that has the support of the B.C. NDP and indigenous communities. With this 180° turn, he is standing against 10,000 good jobs for residents of British Columbia.

We know that we need to take action and that we must grow.

[*English*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact is the Liberals have the same emission targets as the Conservatives. Both of them love pipelines and both would exempt the biggest polluters from paying.

Declaring a climate emergency must mean more than just words. That is why our motion calls for ending fossil fuel subsidies and cancelling the Trans Mountain pipeline, which puts our coastline at risk and indigenous communities into disrespect. I am inviting the government to join in our vision for a climate change plan that leaves no worker or community behind. Will the Prime Minister support our motion?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the NDP cannot talk about leaving no worker behind when yesterday he decided to stand against 10,000 good jobs for British Columbians by opposing the largest private sector investment in Canada's history with LNG Canada, a project that his own colleague, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley, highlighted worked extraordinarily well with indigenous communities to get the right project built in a way that is forward-thinking and responsible.

The NDP is completely inconsistent in its approach not just on the economy, but on the environment now too.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again the Liberals put their billionaire buddies ahead of doing the right thing, as in the case of Mark Norman.

Let us review. A multi-billion-dollar contract was in trouble and their rich friends again needed help, so they made Mark Norman the fall guy. The Liberals withheld key documents, even from the prosecution. Then the Prime Minister called for charges well before they were laid. The Liberals were again caught wasting millions of public dollars helping their rich friends for political gain.

Will the Prime Minister now apologize to Mark Norman and to taxpayers for this travesty?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again we see the NDP jumping on the Conservative bandwagon because the NDP's approach on climate change and the economy has simply fallen flat.

We continue to respect the independence of the judiciary. We always will. Measures were brought forward against the vice-admiral at the direction of the chief of defence staff. That is known by everyone. The New Democrats are stuck, so they are slinging mud too, like the Conservatives.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are obviously still putting rich companies ahead of ordinary people and, in the process, they tarnished a man's reputation.

Oral Questions

The Liberals are once again caught up in a political interference scandal, and once again it is all about getting re-elected. They have also wasted millions of taxpayer dollars. People deserve transparency in the Vice-Admiral Norman case.

Why are the Liberals refusing to tell the truth?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the NDP says it will be there for the people, but it just announced that it is against a project that would have created 10,000 jobs for British Columbians. The B.C. NDP supports the project. His colleague, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley supported the project. Even so, the NDP just decided it is against this project, which would be the biggest private-sector investment in this country's history.

We know that investing in the economy and protecting the environment must go hand in hand. Unfortunately, the NDP has no plan to make that happen.

• (1430)

[English]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister ordered documents to be withheld that could have cleared Vice-Admiral Mark Norman's name months ago. We are now learning that these documents may have been withheld from both the RCMP and the public prosecutor. How can the Liberals claim they did not interfere in this process when they refused to hand over the evidence?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I remind the hon. member that the government met all of its obligations with respect to the third party records applications. All documents in this case for priority individuals identified in February by the defence were provided to the court, over 8,000 documents from seven different departments. As the Prime Minister has just said, the decision to redact information was made by public servants in this case, and overseen by the court. We met all our obligations.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is still absurd that the defence is still waiting for documents from the government. The Liberals claim they did nothing wrong, yet the defence minister regrets the process Vice-Admiral Norman went through. What does he regret? Was it that the Liberals withheld documents from the RCMP? Was it that they withheld documents from the public prosecutor? Was it that they withheld documents from Norman's defence team?

When will the Prime Minister finally set the truth free, and will he testify at the national defence committee?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague is well aware that committees operate independently from the government. We will wait for the committee's deliberations.

Regarding the legal process involving Vice-Admiral Norman, the Public Prosecution Service of Canada noted, when it stayed the charge, that no other factors were considered in this decision, nor was there any contact or influence from outside the PPSC, including political influence, in either the initial decision to prosecute

Mr. Norman or in the decision to stay the charge. Any accusation to the contrary from the opposition is absurd and baseless.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals willingly withheld documents in the *Asterix* file. These documents would have given the RCMP and the prosecution a more complete picture of the situation for their investigation.

Furthermore, the Liberals knew that Mark Norman's defence counsel needed those documents to make its case, but the Liberals never agreed to provide them.

Why did the Prime Minister not give these documents to all those who needed them to mount Vice-Admiral Norman's defence?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government met all of its obligations with respect to the third party records applications. All documents in this case for priority individuals identified in February by the defence were provided to the court as required.

During this case, more than 8,000 documents from this government organization were submitted to the court. The decision to redact information was made by public servants and overseen by the court.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they always blame others.

The Prime Minister should be ashamed for having tarnished the reputation of Admiral Norman. Instead of showing remorse, the Liberals are trying to hide their plot against Admiral Norman by staying the charges against him.

If the Prime Minister had disclosed the documents the defence requested, the RCMP and the prosecutor never would have laid charges against Admiral Norman. Is that true or false?

The Prime Minister betrayed one of our best soldiers. Will the Prime Minister let us get to the bottom of this case and allow the Standing Committee on National Defence to investigate?

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, the committees operate independently from the government, and my colleague knows it. I am sure that is hard for him to grasp, considering who was controlling the committees under the Harper government.

Again, regarding the legal process involving Vice-Admiral Norman, the Public Prosecution Service of Canada noted that no other factors were considered in that decision, nor was there any contact or influence from outside the PPSC, including political influence in either the initial decision to prosecute Mr. Norman or in the decision to stay the charge. Any accusation to the contrary is completely absurd.

Canadians can have confidence in our justice system. They must not allow themselves to be misled by the Conservatives.

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice has stood here in the House and indicated that the government handed over all the documents it was asked for. That is patently untrue, and I have proof.

The counsel for Vice-Admiral Norman said, “It took six months to get documents, and as we sit here today, and as we walked out of that courtroom, we still did not have all of them.” She said there were thousands of documents they had not received.

She went on to say, “I want to make it very clear that we, the defence, had to bring this motion, at great expense to Vice-Admiral Norman, to get at those records.” She said only the government had access, and that it was obviously the government that was “standing in the way of that full disclosure”.

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my department's only involvement was to provide government records in response to a request from the defence to help support the defence of Vice-Admiral Norman. The Department of Justice processed these 52 requests on behalf of seven departments.

The process of determining whether documents were relevant and whether any redactions were necessary was made and conducted by civil servants and then verified by the court. It was up to the court to make the final decision as to whether or not information would be redacted, not the government.

• (1435)

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all the minister does is bring up even more questions and answers we simply do not have. Perhaps we should go back to what the counsel for Vice-Admiral Norman said at the press conference:

No person in this country should ever walk into a courtroom and feel like they are fighting their elected government.

Vice-Admiral Norman himself said:

There are lots of questions that need to be asked and answered about this whole process. I think some people that have been involved in this need to reflect on what happened and why it happened, and their role in that.

What does the Minister of Justice think about his role in this cover-up?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have full confidence in our judicial and parliamentary institutions. The process was designed to make sure that the defendant had every opportunity to access the information relevant to his case and to challenge any decision not to disclose part or all of some document. Canadians can rest assured that this process worked and that the justice system is intact.

As Vice-Admiral Norman's own counsel said, “our justice system is truly unassailable.”

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the last few months the Prime Minister has lost the confidence of his former attorney general and the former president of the Treasury Board over the government's unethical conduct and interference in judicial independence.

Last week, the case against Vice-Admiral Norman fell apart just as we learned that a former star general, the Liberal MP for Orléans, was about to testify against his own government.

My question is for the Prime Minister, and it is about his credibility. If he cannot hold the trust of respected Liberals, how is he going to hold the trust of the Canadian people?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the case to which the hon. member referred was handled by the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, which is independent from the government and independent from the Department of Justice.

My office had no role whatsoever in the handling of this prosecution. That includes the decision to lay charges and the decision to stay charges, as well as the prosecution in-between.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I can see why the Prime Minister does not want to answer. He is becoming the political equivalent of Monty Python's Black Knight.

He speaks of independence, but it was the Prime Minister who stated that there would be a court case against Vice-Admiral Norman, and we have seen how that ended up. Last week he was defending his decision to vet judges through a Liberal donor base; the week before that he was shrugging off a political leak on a Supreme Court nominee, and the week before that, well, I am going to give him a pass today on SNC.

I have a simple question for the Prime Minister. When is he going to apologize to Vice-Admiral Norman and the taxpayers of Canada?

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, based on last week's decision, the deputy minister has reviewed the policy in place regarding Vice-Admiral Norman's request to have his legal fees paid as they relate to this case. She gave us her opinion, and we agree with her, so that is how we will proceed.

In addition, General Vance will speak with Vice-Admiral Norman about the next steps at the appropriate time.

I repeat, no other factors were considered in this decision, nor was there any outside contact or influence, political or otherwise, in relation to this charge. We will always respect the judicial process.

* * *

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are being very disrespectful and condescending towards Quebec, which was completely ignored in yesterday's federal-provincial infrastructure announcement. Minister Bonnardel, the Quebec minister of transport, spoke with the Liberal government and tried to work in partnership with it. How did this Liberal government respond to Quebec's request? It said “no”.

Why do this Liberal Prime Minister and this Liberal government refuse to work in partnership with the provinces?

Oral Questions

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, only a Conservative member would be against a project to improve road travel in Montreal. People in the suburbs north of Montreal have been waiting for this project since 1970.

We are proud to have invested \$345 million to reduce congestion in the suburbs north of Montreal. We are proud to have invested in the extension of Highway 19 between Highway 440 and Highway 640. We are proud to have invested in the rehabilitation of Pie-IX Bridge in Montreal. We are proud to have invested in the construction of a reserved lane for bus rapid transit, carpooling and electric vehicles.

We will continue to invest in all communities across Canada.

• (1440)

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all of that happened without inviting Quebec to be present. Meanwhile, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development said he was shocked by statements made by the Premier of Quebec. The Prime Minister himself accused the Premier of Quebec of playing politics. This Prime Minister is accusing the Premier of Quebec of playing politics.

His comments are disrespectful, paternalistic and condescending, which is par for the course for the sanctimonious Liberals.

When will he co-operate with the provinces?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are certainly in no position to lecture us.

Respect means moving forward on files sent to us by the provinces. In the case of Highway 19, the Government of Quebec submitted the file in September 2018. Mr. Legault's government made it a priority on October 5, 2018. We approved it on March 26, 2019, and I made the announcement on May 13, 2019.

Respect means moving forward on files sent to us by the provinces in time for the construction season.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, order.

The hon. member for Lakeland.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised a collaborative relationship with provinces and territories, but eight provinces and three territories opposed his “no more pipelines” Bill C-69, five provinces are fighting his carbon tax, and the majority of Canadians and indigenous communities all along the route support the Trans Mountain expansion and want it built. Liberals have spent billions, delayed the decision and not built an inch.

Instead of fighting the provinces and pitting Canadians against each other, will the Prime Minister do what he said he would do and release a plan to approve and build the Trans Mountain expansion?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, ever since the Federal Court of Appeal decision of August 2018, we have been working hard to fix the process that was put in place by the previous government, which led to a number of projects being challenged in the courts.

We are engaged in a meaningful conversation and meaningful dialogue to offer accommodations to indigenous peoples to ensure that we move forward on this project in the right way.

We are scheduled to make a decision on this project, as long as we are fulfilling our duty to consult with indigenous communities, by June 18.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe the government should actually listen to the premiers of the provinces.

Saskatchewan, Alberta, Ontario, Manitoba and New Brunswick are all fighting the Liberal carbon tax. They understand that meaningful action to safeguard the environment does not mean that life has to be unaffordable for Canadians. In fact, the carbon tax is not an environmental plan. It is a tax plan.

Instead of forcing provinces to fight him in court, when will the Prime Minister start working with them?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when will the Conservative Party listen to the science on climate change?

We have a motion to debate the emerging climate emergency in Canada. Let us talk about the science. Scientists have shown that Canada is warming at twice the global average, and three times or more in the north. In the national capital region, people are still suffering from flooding. This is a flood that was supposed to happen once every 100 years, and it has now happened twice in two years.

We need to take action on climate change. Why does the Conservative Party not join us in taking serious action on climate change and also growing our economy? We are very proud that we have created a million jobs with Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, speaking of the climate emergency, I want to point out that the majority of young people realize that climate change is a serious issue. As part of the government's youth policy, a number of young people submitted briefs calling on the government to stop subsidizing oil companies. The government, however, continues to hand over millions of dollars to this industry.

The NDP recognizes that climate action is urgently needed. We are calling for ambitious GHG reduction targets and an end to the Trans Mountain project.

Does the government recognize that action is urgently needed? Will it support the NDP's motion and declare an environmental and climate emergency?

Oral Questions

● (1445)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we certainly recognize the climate emergency, which is why we have a motion on the climate emergency.

On the one hand, there is the Conservative Party, which has no climate plan and no economic plan. The Conservatives are saying things that are not true about the price on pollution. On the other hand, there is the NDP, which is flip-flopping on the LNG project, the largest investment in Canadian history, which will help developing countries phase out carbon.

We must combat climate change and grow our economy at the same time. That is what we are doing.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians across this country are asking for urgent action to fight climate change, action that leaves no workers or communities behind. Other countries have done it, and Canada can too.

The government bought a pipeline and is subsidizing the fossil fuel industry. That is not climate action. The Conservatives do not have a plan. Canadians want their government to act courageously on climate change.

The NDP tabled a motion with concrete steps to address the climate emergency, so when is the government finally going to get serious about it?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to outline in great detail our plan to tackle climate change. We negotiated it for a whole year with provinces and territories and indigenous people, and with input from Canadians. We are phasing out coal; we are investing in renewables, and we are ensuring a just transition for communities and workers. We are investing in energy efficiency so we can save people, businesses, schools and hospitals money.

We are investing in clean solutions, innovators and entrepreneurs who are providing the solutions we desperately need. At the same time, we are making sure life is affordable and we are creating good jobs. It is unfortunate that the NDP does not understand that the environment and the economy have to go together. It is cancelling a project supported by the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint John—Rothesay.

* * *

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Wayne Long (Saint John—Rothesay, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, young people in my great riding of Saint John—Rothesay are worried about finding well-paying jobs after they graduate. Thanks to our government's investment in the youth employment strategy, more young people in Saint John—Rothesay are getting the training and skills they need to reach their full potential.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment please update this House on what our government is doing to help young people in my riding get ahead?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Saint John—Rothesay's preamble was absolutely spot-on. After 10 years of Conservative rule, we saw the highest youth unemployment records in the history of the country. After three and a half years of Liberal rule, we now see the lowest records in the history of youth unemployment in this country, because we said we would invest in innovation and we would invest in skills training. That is what we promised we would do, and that is what we did, even better than advertised.

* * *

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us see if they really did do better than advertised.

Four years ago, the current Minister of Finance left Bay Street and offered his services to Canadians as a good steward of the public purse. One of his promises was to run very small deficits for three years before delivering a zero deficit in 2019.

What he actually delivered was three huge deficits and a \$20-billion deficit in 2019.

Could the Minister of Finance stand up and apologize to Canadians for breaking his promise, or rather, for lying to them?

The Speaker: I would ask the hon. member to choose his words with care. He knows that the word he just used is unparliamentary. I know it was a question, but that is why I advise him to be cautious.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a perfect opportunity for me to talk about what we have done over the past four years.

Things are going great for Canadians across the country, with over a million jobs created in four years and the lowest unemployment rate in about 40 years.

Four years ago, unemployment was too high, and growth was too low. We are better off now thanks to our policies.

● (1450)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this all happened when the whole world was experiencing economic growth, boosted by the American economy, which was not the case when the Conservatives were in power.

As a result, Canadians are investing 66% more in the United States and the Americans are investing 50% less in Canada. This message does not lie.

Can the Minister of Finance tell us how many times he ran deficits at his company when he was on Bay Street?

Oral Questions

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, fortunately, when I was in the private sector I had the opportunity to make investments to grow a business. This was very successful, and what we have done here is similar. We decided that the Conservatives had a bad approach that led to too much unemployment and too little growth.

With our approach we are investing for Canadians and have reached another level of growth and the lowest unemployment rate in 40 years. This approach is working for our economy.

* * *

[English]

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Conservatives warned that the carbon tax would be a cash grab, the Prime Minister said, no, that we should look at the B.C. Liberals who brought in a revenue-neutral carbon tax, where taxpayers would get back as much as they paid in. However, this was not as advertised. In fact, it has cost \$1 billion more to British Columbia taxpayers than they have been given back and gas prices are now \$1.80 a litre, something the Prime Minister celebrates as “exactly what we want”.

Are we not headed to \$1.80-a-litre gas price if he is re-elected?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, where are we headed? We are headed to taking serious action on climate change while growing our economy.

Let us look at the facts. We have had to put a price on pollution because we have provinces led by Conservative premiers who do not seem to think climate change is a problem and do not seem to understand the economic opportunity of clean growth.

We are giving money back to Canadians. That is in the legislation. Eighty percent of families will be better off. A family in Ontario will get \$307.

Did the member opposite cash his climate action incentive rebate?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal cheque bounced, as always and as we said it would, just like it did in British Columbia where the government said that taxpayers would be better off by paying high gas prices, but it turned out they were ripped off by \$1 billion in overtaxation.

In that province, gas has reached \$1.80 a litre, the highest price in the history of North America, which is exactly what the Prime Minister says he wants.

Again, are we not headed to \$1.80 for gas if the Prime Minister is re-elected?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is probably good to get the facts on the table. There has been a 1¢ increase in the price of gas in B.C. as related to the price on pollution.

Let us be clear with what we are doing. We are putting a price on pollution and giving the money back. We are taking serious action.

What is the party opposite doing? It is having secret meetings with oil lobbyists to develop its yet-to-be-seen climate plan.

We need to take action on climate change. We owe it to our kids. We have a huge economic opportunity. I am very proud that we are taking action, and we have created a million jobs with Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a reason why the NDP is calling on the Prime Minister to declare a climate and environmental emergency. We are still waiting for the Liberal government's plan, which, to date, has involved purchasing an old pipeline and continuing to subsidize fossil fuels.

People in Berthier—Maskinongé and other areas of Quebec have been hard hit by the recent flooding. Because of climate change, extreme natural disasters will become increasingly common. We still need the Canadian army.

Can the federal government confirm that soldiers will remain in place to help seniors and other residents clean up and remove the sandbags?

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, our thoughts are with all those who have been affected by the flooding and the first responders who are working hard to keep people safe.

Our government is doing everything it can to support response efforts in the affected parts of the country.

We remind people that they must be extremely careful. Those affected should continue to follow the instructions and guidance of municipal law enforcement agencies and first responders.

Canadians can rest assured that the Canadian Armed Forces will support and serve alongside our federal, provincial and municipal partners, who work diligently on behalf of all Canadians.

* * *

● (1455)

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, climate change has become a climate emergency. It is hard to take the Liberals seriously when they adopt ridiculously low targets, buy a pipeline, and create marine protected areas where oil development is permitted.

Knowing that 41% of Quebec's emissions come from the transportation sector, announcing a high-frequency train in the most densely populated corridor in Canada would be part of the solution to the climate emergency.

When will there be real action?

Oral Questions

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his weekly reminder of the high-frequency train.

I want to assure him that we continue to work on this complex and very important file. When we have something to say, he will be informed.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the environment minister claims that Canada is on track to meet the Paris targets, but we know that is not true. The evidence is overwhelming that the Liberals will miss those targets by a country mile.

Canadians are worried about carbon taxes and the skyrocketing price of gas at the pump. It has become very clear that the Liberals do not have a climate plan; they have a tax plan.

Will the minister now admit that her plan does absolutely nothing for the environment and is not as advertised?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess what is advertised is that the Conservatives do not have a plan for the environment. They do not have a plan for the economy. They do not understand that climate change is a serious problem and that we can do both.

We can tackle climate change and we can grow the economy. We have a plan that eliminates coal and invests in renewables. It invests in clean technologies. It invests in energy efficiency. I could go on and on.

Unfortunately, the Conservative Party does not want to come together. It does not want to join Canadians and take serious action to tackle climate change and also grow our economy. We can do both; we need to do both.

* * *

CARBON PRICING

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, part of my riding is rural. There is no public transit. The sky-high gas prices are forcing them to make very difficult decisions about essentials. We have single mums who cannot afford to fill their tanks. We have seniors who are having difficulties making ends meet. We have small businesses that have no choice but to cut jobs or cut wages. The Prime Minister says this is exactly what he wants.

Could the minister explain exactly what he wants? Why sky-high gas prices for rural communities?

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I already talked about the fact that under our climate plan, we are putting a price on pollution and giving the money back.

However, let us talk about all the other measures that are helping single mums in the member opposite's riding. The Canada child benefit raised 300,000 children out of poverty. We have lowered taxes on the middle class, asking the 1% to pay a little more. We

created a million jobs so single moms could have good jobs. We have lowered taxes on small businesses. from 11% to 9%, and created a million jobs for Canadians.

We are going to continue taking action on climate change. We are going to continue growing the economy. We are doing it in a way that is affordable and gets people ahead.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, gas prices are skyrocketing throughout Canada, but in British Columbia we have the highest prices in North America. The Prime Minister has made it very clear that high gas prices are exactly what he wants. Everyone knows that the approval and construction of the Trans Mountain pipeline would help drop the price of gas.

When will the Prime Minister get serious about giving Canadians a break and get the pipeline built?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member on the opposition side and his party were really serious on moving forward on the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion in the right way, they would not have voted to shut down the consultation process and kill this project and the process that we have put in place.

We are working hard on this project. We are moving forward with meaningful consultation with the indigenous community. We are scheduled to make a decision on this project by June 18.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, almost every issue we talk about in the Standing Committee on Health has a mental health component, whether it is post-traumatic stress, or methamphetamine addiction, or LGBTQ issues or indigenous health. There is always a mental health common denominator.

Could the Minister of Health tell us what she is doing in her department to help Canadians with mental health issues right across the board?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Cumberland—Colchester for his hard work on the health committee as the chair.

As someone whose first job was as a mental health counsellor, I am proud to be a member of a government that has made a historic investment of \$5 billion in the area of mental health and addiction services. We are also targeting our efforts to support the mental health of young Canadians, indigenous peoples, the LGBTQ community, black Canadians, veterans and so much more.

Oral Questions

I am proud of these efforts and we will not stop until every Canadian gets the help and assistance they need when it comes to mental health.

* * *

•(1500)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard today that the murderer of Tori Stafford is seeking compensation from the government for her “unfair treatment”.

Canadians will remember that the Liberals moved Tori’s killer from a maximum-security prison to a healing lodge until outraged Canadians forced them to reverse their decision.

Will the government commit to fight her attempts at getting any taxpayer dollars for putting her back behind bars where she belongs?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not at all clear what the status of any alleged court proceeding might be. Indeed, the media coverage with respect to the judge’s comments would indicate that he is not clear what the status is.

The member can be assured that the Government of Canada will very strongly defend its position.

* * *

TRANSPORTATION SAFETY

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as co-founder and co-chair of the parliamentary all-party cycling caucus, I am pleased to share that today is Bike Day on the Hill.

Approximately 200,000 Canadians cycle to work, which is good for their health and our environment. Sadly, on average, 75,000 Canadians are seriously injured while cycling each year and 74 cyclists are killed. Many tragedies can be prevented with improved cycling infrastructure and side guards on heavy trucks. We must do better to keep Canadians safe.

The NDP is calling for a national cycling strategy. Will the government get on board and help make Canada a cycling nation?

Hon. Marc Garneau (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a cyclist myself, I realize that the point brought up by my colleague is a very important one. That is why last year we published a report that was the product of 10 provinces, three territories and the federal government putting together 57 measures that could be used to improve safety for vulnerable road users, not only cyclists but pedestrians as well.

We realize how important this is. Within federal jurisdiction, we are already undertaking pilot projects to improve the visibility of large commercial trucks so truck drivers can see the cyclists.

* * *

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government understands the importance of the Canadian minerals and mining sector to our economy and to the communities across the country. Our government believes developing Canada’s

natural resources in cleaner, more sustainable ways will create good middle-class jobs, enhance competitiveness and reduce pollution as we move to a clean energy future. We have made significant investments to achieve these goals.

In celebration of National Mining Week, could the minister update the House on steps our government has taken to ensure Canada’s mining sector continues on a path to prosperous sustainable development for years to come?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his hard work.

The mining sector supports over 600,000 good middle-class jobs across the country. It is the second-largest private sector employer of indigenous peoples in Canada.

Our government stands behind this sector. That is why we extended the mineral exploration tax credit for a full five years and launched the minerals and metals plan. Workers in the sector help empower our clean economy. We wish them a very happy National Mining Week.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, why does Canada need the *Asterix* and the *Obelix*? Because the *Preserver* and the *Protecteur* are out of commission and there was a fire aboard one of them. This is a national emergency for the Royal Canadian Navy.

Vice-Admiral Norman understood that. The Prime Minister dragged him through the mud. Now he can redeem himself.

When will he place the order for the *Obelix*? That is what 1,200 laid-off Davie shipyard workers would like to know. They worked for Canada and are ready to do so again.

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, our government is 100% committed to strengthening the Royal Canadian Navy and ensuring that it has the resources it needs to serve Canadians.

The Davie shipyard employees delivered the *Asterix*, and we know they did excellent work. Our government relies on official advice from the Department of National Defence and the armed forces to assess the navy’s needs.

The commander of the navy publicly stated that there is no immediate need for a second temporary supply ship and that he is satisfied with the services provided by the *Asterix*.

Our government has complete confidence in the navy’s advice and will continue to invest in the Royal Canadian Navy.

Points of Order

●(1505)

INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITIES

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec government builds our infrastructure, not Ottawa. The Canada-Quebec agreement is clear on this. Infrastructure is a provincial and municipal responsibility. However, Ottawa is trying to impose conditions on us, and the result is a tramway project in Quebec that has been stopped in its tracks. Our projects are going nowhere because Ottawa prefers to argue.

Will the minister stop creating conflicts and send Quebec the infrastructure funding as a lump sum with no strings attached, as the Quebec government has asked?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, we are working closely with the Quebec government.

The Highway 19 project was introduced by the Government of Quebec, and Premier Legault made it a priority. As announced yesterday, the project was then approved in Ottawa.

We work closely with our colleagues and respect provincial jurisdictions. There is no question that we will continue to invest in communities across the country.

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, instead of making grand statements, I invite the minister to reread the Canada-Quebec infrastructure agreement. It states that “Canada’s role in any Project is limited to making a financial contribution, and that it will have no involvement in the implementation...or...operation. Canada is neither a decision-maker nor an administrator”.

The minister’s election announcement about Highway 19 is nothing but talk. Not even one centimetre of the highway will be built.

Instead of arguing, the government should transfer the lump sum to Quebec.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we work very closely with our Quebec colleagues.

As I said yesterday, we are not in election mode, we are in construction mode. What Quebecers expect from us is that we promptly look at projects submitted by all provinces, that we approve them according to the criteria set out in the bilateral agreement and, above all, that we announce them in time for construction season. If there is one thing that will not wait, it is construction season.

We are going to move forward.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, CCF): Mr. Speaker, on the Mark Norman case, it has been refreshing to hear the federal NDP leader speak up for due process.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Regina—Lewvan has the floor.

Mr. Erin Weir: Mr. Speaker, that case and the SNC-Lavalin controversy have raised questions about interference in our justice system. They have also underscored the need for independent review of decisions made by the director of public prosecutions.

Will the government commit to separate the office of the attorney general from the minister of justice if re-elected?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government firmly believes in the institutions of government and respects them deeply. On this particular issue, we have asked—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Windsor West will come to order.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, we have asked a former minister of justice and attorney general of Canada, the hon. Anne McLellan, to look into this matter and give us her recommendations. Her track record is impressive, and she understands the various pressures that come along with this position. I look forward to working closely with her to ensure that our government continues to set higher standards for governance.

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POINTS OF ORDER**JUSTICE**

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties, and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the House recognize Vice-Admiral Mark Norman for his decades of loyal service to Canada, express regret for the personal and professional hardships he endured as a result of his failed prosecution, and apologize to him and his family for what they experienced during their legal conflict with the government.

●(1510)

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADA–MADAGASCAR TAX CONVENTION IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2018

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill S-6, An Act to implement the Convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income, be read the third time and passed.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, fellow MPs and parliamentary staff, I rise today to say goodbye. I have come to know many of you over the last 19 years here. We have spent many long days and late nights right here working together for Canadians right across our wonderful country.

Over 338 of us have the honour to sit in this chamber representing and working for our constituents back at home. Today I would like to recognize the ones who helped me get to this special place.

First, I would like to recognize my parents, John and Jean Eyking. I am so fortunate that they emigrated from their homeland, the Netherlands, not only to come to Canada but to start a new life on the beautiful island of Cape Breton. They raised 10 of us while being successful in business. They contributed to major projects in Cape Breton, and helped many in need. They will be recognized next week in the Cape Breton Business and Philanthropy Hall of Fame.

My parents cherished democracy and told us that voting is very important, but it was close friends of our family, George and Sharon Unsworth, who encouraged me to enter politics. I will never forget the day George came looking for me in the broccoli field and asked me to run.

I feel so fortunate that I became part of the Liberal team. Prime Ministers Chrétien, Martin and our Prime Minister today not only helped me achieve so much for Cape Breton Island but also gave me the opportunity to work with all Canadians, whether here in Canada or internationally. I look forward to more great work done by our Prime Minister after October.

I would like to thank so many back in Cape Breton who helped me get here. I cannot name them all, because we would end up sitting here until midnight, but I recognize the teams that worked on the ground to get me elected six times.

I thank Meryl Buchanan and the Victoria County team; Bob Jardine and the northsiders; Vince MacLean and Gerard MacNamara, from the Sydney team; Chief Leroy, from the Eskasoni team; and the dynamic duo, Dave Wilton and Mary Woodman and their New Waterford team. Of course, we can never forget our sign guys, Stan and Charlie. I thank the team for not only getting me re-elected but for putting on fundraisers every year to pay the bills.

I would especially like to thank everyone from my riding of Sydney—Victoria who had faith in me and checked off my name at the ballot box. Through my years of representing them, I had the

Government Orders

opportunity to meet them in their kitchens, community centres, places of worship, and of course, workplaces. I was fortunate to represent such a diverse group of people with so much compassion and resilience.

When I was elected, my mom said, “Work hard for Cape Breton, and behave while you're up there.” One might say that is a bit challenging when I was sharing Cape Breton and living with Rodger. I know I am not supposed to call him Rodger. I am supposed to call him the member for Cape Breton—Canso, but we are too close for that. We not only pulled off a lot for people back home, we had a lot of fun doing it. I stand here today to recognize him, along with all my fellow MPs, who through the years supported me every step of the way.

All of us in this chamber get a lot of credit when we succeed in doing important work for our ridings, but we all know that our staff is one of the keys to our success. They must respond at all times not only to us but to our constituents when challenges arise.

My staff, John Patrick, Elizabeth, Ann, Meghan, Ryan and Sean not only take care of things back home but keep things running smoothly up here on the Hill.

I would also like to thank my previous staff who helped me: Darlene, John Coady, Diane and Kirby.

Every day our office faces new challenges. Some days it is helping a constituent. Other days it is assisting communities with projects or dealing with emergencies. We had the tar ponds and we had the major floods during Thanksgiving.

We have a workload at home and also in Ottawa, whether it is the work in this chamber or at committees. In our caucus it is crucial for bringing this country forward, and it all comes from our staff.

There are so many on the Hill who also deserve recognition. Whether they work in departments or help me get to the Hill by cab or get me on the airplane, they all help to get the job done, and I thank them all very much.

● (1515)

Over my 19 years, one of my biggest focuses has been the extension of the EI sickness benefits from 15 weeks to 50 weeks for those who need it the most. I would like to thank my staff for the important research and all the organizations that supported me in this pursuit. I would like to thank all the members in this chamber for unanimously passing my motion last week, Motion No. 201. We know the extension of EI sickness benefits is not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing to do.

Government Orders

Some people ask how I got through so many challenging situations over the last 19 years. It is because my team helps me get the job done. As I said, we do not get through politics alone. There are many sacrifices in politics, and many proud moments. I encourage all Canadians to get involved, whether by putting their name on the ballot or by encouraging and supporting someone who wants to put their name forward. People who do that are so important. We live in the most beautiful country in the world, whether it is our landscape or our culture and diversity, but without a solid democratic foundation, it is all for naught.

I am now going to thank the person who made my life complete.

Forty years ago, my wife Pam and I met. It started after a dance. She came back to the farm with me that evening because we had just received 10,000 new baby chickens. She helped me feed them. Her being from Dartmouth and my being from Cape Breton made for a lot of travel back and forth to see each other, and we are still doing that today.

Pam and I started a vegetable farm, and we were very successful. We received many awards. We had wonderful, hard-working employees who helped us achieve success, people like Joe King, Eldridge, Sissy and of course our special Whitty Mom.

I was not the only one to be successful in getting elected. Pam was elected the MLA for Victoria Lakes. Again, we worked hard together to accomplish many projects in our region, especially the one we are most proud of, doing a makeover of the world-famous Cabot Trail.

We were blessed with four wonderful children, Mieka, Josh, Bethany and Jonah, and along with their spouses Christian, Natalie, and Wade, we now have six beautiful grandchildren and one on the way. This is one of the main reasons that I am leaving this wonderful place. I am so happy that two of my grandchildren have joined me on the Hill today, Lucienne and Davie.

I would like to say goodbye with my personal definition of how to be fulfilled in one's life: May you live in the place that you love; may you do the things that you enjoy; and most importantly, may you be surrounded by those who share those goals with you.

I was truly blessed.

• (1520)

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I promise I have a very important question for this member, which I will get to rather shortly.

When I was asked to speak here today, I was told to say some nice things about Mark. I said, "Okay." Then I asked Rodger, and he said, "I don't know." I said, "He was a farmer, so he has to be a good guy."

Seriously, I first met the member for Sydney—Victoria at the agriculture committee. He was in opposition and we were in government. The member for Malpeque also joined us on the agriculture committee, and we had some great battles—but respectful battles. One thing we always knew about this member is that when he fought a battle, it was for the right reason. It was for a farmer or an issue very important to him and his constituents. He fought hard and fought well. I respect him for that.

I think it was in the second year I was elected that I decided I was going to take some Spanish lessons in a little place called Bocas del Toro. Bocas del Toro is hard to get to. It is in Panama on a little island on the Caribbean side. I was in Bocas del Toro taking these Spanish lessons and staying at a hotel. One morning I got up, went out on my balcony, looked over and saw the member for Sydney—Victoria standing there in the middle of Panama. I said to myself, "What the heck?"

It was actually a couple of good days. We got to know him and Pam. He explained to me how he had done some work in Panama when he was younger, helping to develop the greenhouse industry so that people could be more self-sufficient and earn a living. He had come back just to check up on that. He thought that would be something to do. I think it is something he has planned in the future. I encourage him to continue doing that, because he has a gift for doing that type of work.

Then I got to know the member at the trade committee. He was the chair of the trade committee, and I will say this: He ran a good committee. It was a civil committee. It was a committee that actually functioned. I have to say we have some good memories from being on that committee as we travelled around the U.S. on the CUSMA. Even last week, we were down in Washington working together. I think a lot of Canadians would be proud of that committee and how we put our partisan differences aside, left them here in Ottawa, and went down there and did what we had to do for Canadian businesses and Canadian voters.

I think, Mr. Eyking, you can take pride in knowing you were part of that and helped move the yardsticks to make it better. I definitely want to highlight that factor also. I hope you will remember those types of trips, because we had some really good times together.

I want to thank Pam and her family. She shared a great guy with Ottawa. She allowed him to serve. She allowed him to do what was honourable. She gave up a lot of time so he could be here with Rodger.

Seriously, when members travel here on a Sunday, are gone until Thursday or Friday, then travel home to do two or three events on the weekend and then do it all again, it is a huge sacrifice. We tend to forget that it is not only the members who are making the sacrifice, but also their families. We thank his family for allowing him to do that, because allowing him to do that meant that he was able to do some great things here in Ottawa.

Mark, I want to thank you for your service. You served well. You have integrity, served with honour and showed respect to everyone. I can honestly say that your constituents and the people around you are very proud of you because of the way you conduct yourself here in Ottawa.

I will get to the last question at this point in time. The chair of the international trade committee promised the members of the committee one last lobster dinner. Can the member please inform this House when that dinner will take place?

Government Orders

•(1525)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Sydney—Victoria has agreed that we can have the various questions and comments, and then he will wind up at the end. Perhaps that will give him time to contact some lobster fishermen in his riding and arrange a shipment or something.

The hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a great opportunity for me to thank the member for Sydney—Victoria. We served together for 19 years, we lived together for 13 years and I have taken lessons from him out of both experiences.

The greatest lesson in perseverance I have learned would be in the energy, effort and tenacity he showed on the project that was the Sydney tar ponds. North America's toughest and biggest environmental tragedy was the Sydney tar ponds. When he came to this place, he was seized with making sure that the people in our community were able to deal with that. It was not easy.

He was like Diana Ross and with Senator Al Graham, I was like one of the Supremes, but he pushed that through Nova Scotia caucus and Atlantic caucus and through Ontario and national caucus to the finance minister and the Prime Minister's Office to get \$280 million to clean up North America's worst toxic site. The people in Cape Breton and Nova Scotia should always be very thankful. I am very proud of the job he did on that particular file.

Of course, as I said, I lived with him for 13 years. As far as cleaning up goes, he was much better as an MP than he was as a roommate.

I had the great opportunity to spend a bunch of time with his great family, Pam and Mieka and Josh and Jonah. Josh and Jonah moved in with us for a little bit, and in the Eykings, they were like earwigs: They were everywhere. I said that I had to get out of that place.

However, it was beautiful because his boys were older than mine. When we first started, the member had sort of a curly Afro. Then Josh hit his teens, and it disappeared soon after. He used to always say, "Listen, bulldog, don't worry; your time will come" as my boys got older, and they did. He was able to mentor me on how to deal with problem children. He has turned out to be a loving husband and a great father.

We did have a great deal of fun, but one of the first things we had to do as rookie members of Parliament was get on a flight to Cape Breton to deliver the message that the federal government was getting out of the coal mining business. That was a tough one. For friends, family and the whole community, there was a nervousness and a fear coming out of that. It was a tough one for us to deliver.

The current Minister of Public Safety was in natural resources at the time, and with Prime Minister Chrétien and finance minister Paul Martin, we were able to put the supports and transition measures in place that allowed the community to shoulder the impact of that tough decision.

We went through a lot of stuff together, and the Harper Conservatives gave us a lot of stuff to work with. It was sort of a

veritable buffet when they closed the Veterans Affairs office and made cuts to CBC. We were able to stand together with our communities and take those things on.

Through all this, know that there is no finer family man and no greater gentleman in this chamber. There is no greater guy in this place. There have been all kinds of good people who have come through here and provided us with the opportunity to meet so many wonderful people.

I know that the member for Sydney—Victoria is retiring only from Parliament and that he will lead an active life in his retirement. I know he will enjoy it, and he deserves it. It has been fabulous getting to know him. I consider him a friend.

All the best.

•(1530)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay special tribute to the member for Sydney—Victoria.

When I was first elected to the House, I was on the agriculture committee. The Liberal government was trying to get through a very contentious bill on agriculture, and there were a lot of problems with it, as there are with a lot of legislation. At the time, there was a minority government, so every vote counted.

At committee, we did one round of voting on some of the clauses, and the member for Sydney—Victoria voted with the opposition. The next day, the whip came down and he was out of that committee, replaced with someone who was more than willing to do whatever the PMO said. I had just been elected, and this really impressed me.

As much as we are here for partisan reasons, at the end of the day, we are here to represent the people who sent us. Farm and rural people sent him here, and he knew the files really well. The fact that the Liberals let him become a committee chair afterward is a testament to the credibility he has in the House.

Many people come here. Some swallow the Kool-Aid, and some become bitter. I have never seen the member for Sydney—Victoria lose his incredible sense of humour and warmth. Maybe he treated me nicely because my aunts were nuns in the convent on Whitney Pier. My family was in the first wave of Cape Breton coal mine closures, and that is why we ended up in northern Ontario.

Through it all, he has been a really good presence in the House. Along with his partner in crime, the other Cape Bretoner, he has brought a sense of decency and a sense of community to this place.

I want to pay special tribute to his family as well. People read in the newspaper that we are going to make Parliament more family-friendly, but it is not. It is a terrible life for families.

Government Orders

I am interested in the member's work with greenhouses. When I ran for the leadership of the NDP, I sat down with my wife and told her that it would affect our family and we should talk. She said, "Spare me. I've heard all the promises. Here's the deal. You run for the leadership, and win or lose, you build me a greenhouse." When I lost, I did not get angry; I came home and built the best damn greenhouse. Now all these people in the north want a greenhouse from me. When I retire, maybe the member and I can go into business together.

We have talked about his great sense of humour and the fact that he is a great parliamentarian. People may not be aware that he is also a great humanitarian and, as I understand, an animal rights activist.

There have been a lot of rumours over the years about the poor beaver that was out on the road when the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria and the member for Cape Breton—Canso were coming home. This could not have been at two in the morning, so they were probably at a caucus meeting.

The way I heard the story, they found the poor beaver on the road and managed to get it down to the river. That is somewhere in the ether of legend, and I would like the hon. member to confirm what happened to the beaver. Did the member for Cape Breton—Canso end up in the river alongside the beaver while trying to help? For the record of Parliament and what is going to be in Hansard 150 years from now, I ask him to stand up, unashamed, and tell us the truth. What happened to that beaver?

• (1535)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

In a few moments I will let the hon. member for Sydney-Victoria defend himself on that. Of course, my understanding is that it might have been a bit late in the evening, and the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso was directing traffic while the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria did the real hard work of getting down on all fours to corral the beaver and get it moving. It was kind of resistant throughout the whole thing, as I understand. I look forward to hearing about that.

The hon. member for Niagara Falls.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I too want to convey my congratulations to the hon member for Sydney—Victoria. I thank him for all his service to Cape Breton and to this great country. When he was talking about the members of his family and his grandchildren, I could not help but think that they will forever remember the hon. member's service to this country and to Cape Breton. It is something they will be very proud of for generations to come.

I wish him all the very best, but I have one small favour to ask him. As he is aware, I think slightly more than half the people in Sydney—Victoria are related to me. When he goes back to thank them for all their support, he should tell them that now that he is leaving, they can consider other political parties to support. I wish he could do that.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, to my dear friend, the member of Parliament for Sydney—Victoria, as a Caper myself from Margaree, I remember his first political action as the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria, which was very

green. It was fighting the Point Aconi coal-fired power plant that was going to suck the water out of the farms on Boularderie Island, which it did. However, that was when I first came across the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria. As members have heard, his actions as a member of Parliament have continued to be green.

We worked on the Sydney tar ponds issue. I well remember, as some members would, that in the spring of 2001, right around this time of year, which was before 9/11 and so protesters were allowed to sit right by the members' entrance, I was there on a hunger strike. I thought two or three days and Allan Rock would crack. I never thought I would have to be on a hunger strike for 17 days to get the commitment to clean up the Sydney tar ponds. However, the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria, who had been a member of Parliament for something like six months, came outside and talked to me. He said, "Geez, this place. I don't know if I'm ever going to figure out how to make this place work so I can get things done. I knew how to work when I was home on the farm."

I do not know if the hon. member remembers those conversations, but he certainly did figure out how to get things done. From that early first time of being elected, I think in the fall of 2000, until today, he has gotten a lot done. We did not always agree on the way we should clean up the Sydney tar ponds, but we sure did make a big improvement.

My hon. colleague for Cape Breton—Canso is a cousin to my sister-in-law. It is all very cozy at home. I want to put it on the record, as leader of the Green Party, to certify and satisfy some of the earlier questions. This may not be in Hansard, but in the annals of Hinterland Who's Who members will find the hon. members for Cape Breton—Canso and Sydney—Victoria for their daring midnight rescue of the beaver in the middle of Wellington Street and getting it down to the water.

The hon. member for Sydney—Victoria first flashed across our TV screens in Cape Breton many years ago, as this handsome young farmer speaking on behalf of chicken farmers everywhere and, with a great big smile, saying, "Get cracking". It was a good ad, and here he is all these years later.

The hon. member for Sydney—Victoria has accomplished a great deal, and I will really miss him around here, assuming I can get re-elected. He is a dear friend, a solid citizen and a wonderful family man. In the language of Gaelic in Cape Breton, *go raibh maith agat*; in the language of the Mi'kmaq, *wela'lin*; and a good dose of Dutch, *dank u wel*.

• (1540)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have had the opportunity to get to know the member for Sydney—Victoria over the last number of years, and it is safe to say, as my friend said, that he is a class act. He genuinely is a classy guy.

Government Orders

When I think of him, I think about agriculture and trade, and I have this wonderful story. When he was the critic for agriculture for the Liberal Party, he said he was coming to Manitoba and would like to take a tour of a chicken farm and so forth. I called a chicken facility and said that the agriculture critic for the Liberal Party was coming over and I wanted to impress him. I asked if we could come and watch some chickens being slaughtered. The response was dead silence on the phone, until finally the person said, “We don't slaughter chickens; we process chickens.” However, when the member visited Manitoba, we had a wonderful tour of this facility, and I learned a lot from him that day.

I think it is fair to say that for many of his colleagues who have had the opportunity to get to know him throughout the years, two things come to mind. One, they would all come to a consensus that he is a classy guy. Two, he always had something to share, and what he shared was done in such a fashion that it was educational, with information that would definitely be sustained and retained, because he is also a very wise man.

We are going to miss him very much. He has always been a fabulous asset to this House and to the caucus, and a good friend.

The Speaker: I hope the House will indulge me while I reminisce for a second or two about the times we have had together, Mark. We got to be friends after we came in 2000. I was coming back after my involuntary sabbatical, but we came together.

I had the great pleasure of working with you over that time on many issues and many things. It has been wonderful to have you around. We had to deal with the hon. member for Cape Breton—Canso; that could be a challenge of course. The two of you were sharing an apartment for a long time, and everyone referred to it as the Cape Breton embassy because there were so many visitors from Cape Breton there. Many of us were upset that you decided to divorce, to split up and move into separate places. However, you reconciled later so everyone was pleased. On all sides of the House, people were pleased to see that.

We appreciate your sense of humour, all of us do, and your hard work. I know you care very deeply about the people of Sydney—Victoria, Cape Breton and all of Canada. I know you care deeply about your family. I want to wish you and Pam and your magnificent family the very best in the future.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, there is so much love in this room that I think I am going to stay.

I do not want to challenge the Speaker; I never did in my 19 years. However, I am challenging him on this one. We are not divorced. We are just separated because of the kids, and we are all right.

I would like to make a few comments, and I guess I will start with the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. I have to confess that not everybody in our family votes Liberal. There is one in our family who has a crush on her, but he has to let that go because she is married now. We have a Greenie in our midst.

I wish good luck to the member from Niagara, with Hayes MacNeil and Vince MacLean, his cousins. They are pretty entrenched back there, so good luck getting one of the MacNeils and MacLeans to run, but I appreciate it. There is so much Cape Breton connection here.

The tar ponds were also brought up. That was a really big challenge, but it was one of those things that happen where nobody in this House could disagree it had to be done. It started with a community group, with Dan Fraser and the community. They started it. At that time, there was a good Conservative premier, John Hamm, who stepped right up to the plate with the member for Cape Breton—Canso and me, and we got it done. If you, Mr. Speaker, and others in this chamber ever come to Sydney, go downtown and see this beautiful park. There is a new business there now with 300 or 400 employees. It is just a wonderful thing. It is a project that is not about me; it is about Canadians all doing the right thing and getting it done.

To the member for Timmins—James Bay, the beaver story comes up and for the record I have to straighten this out about what meeting the member for Cape Breton—Canso and I were coming from. It was a meeting at D'Arcy McGee's, and it was one of those meetings with the member for Cape Breton—Canso where I would say, “It's time to go home now.” It was April 1. God love the poor lady who was on 911 on the other end, but it was April 1. We saw the beaver and the member for Cape Breton—Canso called 911 right off the bat. He calls 911 and says we are two members of Parliament, on April Fool's Day, and we are on Sparks Street and we have a beaver. She told him he was tying up the line and all that stuff. I asked the member for Cape Breton—Canso how that was working out; well, it was not going very well. Anyway, we did get the beaver. The member for Cape Breton—Canso has some qualities. I do not think he was ever on a farm before, but he has some qualities. Anyway, we got the beaver across the road and he was not paying attention very much but we got the beaver in the river. However, he was following us back to the Cape Breton embassy and we had to go back and chase him down again, so we got the job done.

The member for Prince Albert and I came up here, and we are farmers and we worked hard for our people. There is never a day that we do not think about the fine people in this country and around the world who produce the food for us to put on the table. We always agreed on that and worked together on that. I thank him very much for being on agriculture and on trade with me. Maybe we can go down there. He knows Spanish better than I do, so maybe he can do the translation down there and we can do more projects.

Mr. Speaker, I will close. This has been such a wonderful experience for me, being in this House, as the son of an immigrant and being a business person. It is not easy for someone in business coming up here. Having so much support back home and here, I never had to worry about what was happening behind me, so I could always look ahead. I thank my colleagues very much.

● (1545)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after so many tributes to one of our colleagues, it is hard to get back to the debate on a bill like Bill S-6.

Government Orders

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the member for Sydney—Victoria on all he has done. The kind words coming from all sides of the House prove that he was obviously very well liked and wonderful to work with all these years. I too would like to wish him all the best.

We are here today to debate Bill S-6. Our job is to talk about bills and discuss the various motions brought before the House. Bill S-6 implements the convention between Canada and the Republic of Madagascar for the avoidance of double taxation and the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income, and a related protocol.

The convention is based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's model tax convention on income and on capital. A bill like this is introduced for two main reasons. The first is to avoid double taxation, and the second is to prevent fiscal evasion. Once this bill is implemented, it will provide relief from taxation rules set out in the Income Tax Act. It cannot be implemented until the bill is passed. We on this side of the House plan to support the bill.

Since we are talking about international relations, I want to talk about a speech that the leader of the official opposition gave to the Montreal Council on Foreign Relations, or MCFR. He gave his excellent speech to a full house on May 7 in Montreal.

The leader of the official opposition spoke about this country's foreign affairs, which is why I am making a link to the bill we are debating today. Maintaining healthy relations with other countries based on respect and rules is what enables us to continue to prosper and find our place in an ever-changing, fast-moving world.

Before I talk about the opposition leader's vision for foreign affairs, I want to talk about the government's track record in that regard. Shortly after the 2015 election, the Prime Minister said that Canada was back. He took credit for the good reputation that Canada had built over the years under all of the previous governments. Unfortunately, in 2019, it seems that Canada has gone nowhere. Here is what the opposition leader had to say, and I quote:

The profound arrogance of [the Prime Minister]'s words foreshadowed how the new Prime Minister would conduct Canada's foreign affairs: with style over substance.

It is public knowledge that the government has made many serious mistakes, and they are almost always attributable to the Prime Minister's poor judgment. Let us not forget the trans-Pacific partnership. He was a complete no-show for a very important meeting. Observers said at the time that the Japanese were seething about what they perceived as a last-minute betrayal by the Prime Minister of Canada.

We all know the details of his trip to India. Certain images come to mind every time someone mentions it. As the Leader of the Opposition said before the MCFR, what is perhaps less known is how seriously that trip hurt Canadians. Bilateral trade with India totals about \$9 billion annually. The Prime Minister's trip to India seriously set us back in terms of helping Canadians benefit from increased trade.

We need to look at what is behind the image and the photo ops, at the impact of these actions. As former Liberal minister Ujjal Dosanjh

stated, it is disappointing that the Canada-India relationship could have gone to the next level, but we have bungled it.

More recently, we have witnessed the government's defeatist attitude toward China. A wait-and-see approach has now become the norm. China has taken totally unjustified trade actions directed against Canadian farmers, canola farmers, the pork industry, and livestock genetics companies. Unfortunately, the crisis only seems to grow worse every day.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has just returned from a G20 ministerial meeting in Japan, where she had an opportunity to talk to her Chinese counterpart and clearly state Canada's position on the canola crisis, which is preventing Canada from exporting canola seed to China. However, this meeting on the importance of market access rules-based trade for Canadian agri-food products and opportunities was inconclusive.

● (1550)

According to the news release issued by the minister, she had an introductory conversation with the Chinese minister of agriculture on the margins of the G20 meeting and expressed Canada's deep concern with the suspension of Canadian exports. The Minister of Agriculture has been asking China to allow her send a technical delegation to verify the Chinese government's allegations about the quality of Canadian canola for a month now, but she is satisfied with an introductory conversation with the Chinese minister of agriculture.

Unfortunately, the department's news release makes no mention of the Chinese minister's response. We do not know what he said, and unfortunately, we do not expect a technical delegation to be sent to China, since the minister surely did not want to displease her Chinese counterpart, while China is causing billions of dollars in damage to the Canadian economy.

That is not all. Today, Grain Growers of Canada called on the federal government to provide meaningful support to the Canadian agriculture industry. They want it to develop a strategy to address an increasingly unpredictable trade environment that is affecting the incomes of grain farmers. The strategy should recognize that China's blocking of Canadian canola is politically motivated, which was acknowledged last week by the Prime Minister. However, government politicians are hesitant. The ministers refuse to stand up to China, and we are seeing the consequences. We are caught in the middle of the trade war between the United States and China. That has serious repercussions for all grain farmers in Canada.

The GGC press release also reveals that, in addition to the suspension of canola imports from Canada, soybean prices are dropping and imports to China have slowed to a trickle, reaching levels not seen in a decade. Industry and government officials have confirmed that Chinese importers are reluctant to sign contracts for other Canadian agricultural products given the uncertainty in the market.

Government Orders

Grain Growers of Canada chair Jeff Nielsen says the time has come for the Canadian government to aggressively defend the interests of Canada's agricultural sector in China and around the world. GGC vice chair Markus Haerle of St. Isidore, Ontario, says that the issues we are seeing with trade into China can no longer be said to be commodity-specific. As a soybean farmer, he has seen his prices plummet and markets close due to the flooding of the market by U.S. product.

The press release concludes by saying that, in addition to Chinese disruption, the loss of the Indian pulse market and the Italian durum market has added to the long list of risks that farmers are expected to manage. That is what we have been saying for months. For at least two months now, we have been telling the House that the Government of Canada has to stand up to China because it did not stand up to Italy, it did not stand up to India when that country imposed tariffs, and it did not stand up to Vietnam. The Liberal government's inaction and wait-and-see approach are causing billions of dollars' worth of damage to the Canadian economy.

When we are talking about billions of dollars in damage to the Canadian economy, we have to spare a thought for every farmer in every province of Canada. Each of them has suffered losses on the order of \$10,000, \$20,000, \$50,000 or \$100,000 since the beginning of the year because they cannot sell their product.

We asked for three things. First, we asked for changes to the advance payments program. The Leader of the Opposition had to pressure the government into tabling a plan to help canola farmers. Second, we asked for a complaint to be filed with the World Trade Organization. There has been radio silence on that from the Liberal government. Lastly, we asked the government to appoint an ambassador to China. It seems obvious to me that if we want to resolve a crisis—

• (1555)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. The hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby on a point of order.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, there are no government members in the House. We do not seem to have quorum.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I will check.

And the count having been taken:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We do not have a quorum. The bells will ring to call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We now have a quorum. Resuming debate. The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

• (1600)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to address my colleagues.

I would like to remind the House of how the Liberals have managed international trade relations since the Prime Minister's trip to India. There has been the wheat crisis with Italy, the pulse crisis

with India and, more recently, the canola crisis with China. The government chose not to take any action.

Canadian citizens and farmers are shouldering the burden of the government's failure to act. Unfortunately, they will have to bear that burden for a long time, because the government shows no interest or willingness to settle these disputes. The government refuses to be assertive and stand up for Canadians in international trade relations.

I will close by citing the Canola Council of Canada. This week, I received a document in which it calls for some very simple measures. The Canola Council of Canada is asking the government to take all possible measures to engage the Chinese government and come to a long-term agreement to restore canola seed exports.

They do not want introductory or preliminary meetings, they want a meeting where Canada clearly states its position.

Stable relations are vital if we want to fight tax evasion and maintain good relations with our colleagues in all countries. Unfortunately, it seems the government has no intention of moving in that direction. It is time for the government to take action on behalf of Canadian canola farmers.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to come back to the treaty with Madagascar, since that is the subject of today's debate.

After the committee study, does my colleague think that the bill is a one-way deal?

Our economic relations with Madagascar are based primarily on Canadian mining companies operating there. However, there are very few companies from Madagascar operating in Canada. There is some trade, but this treaty is mainly a one-way affair. The Canadian companies operating in Madagascar will be the ones to benefit from it.

Is he concerned about the fact that the treaty is a one-way deal that benefits Madagascar's economy, not Canada's economy?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his excellent question.

That is why we must establish sound trade relations with all countries, including Madagascar. That is why we are encouraging the people of Madagascar to invest more in Canada.

These types of treaties will make it possible to establish clear and specific rules so that bilateral investment and tax relations are clearer, which will also promote trade between our two countries. That is what we must remember.

As we have seen, when a government is unable to maintain healthy relations with other countries in certain areas, it affects all trade relations with those countries. We have also seen that it is practically impossible to maintain trade relations with China right now, since China does not play by the rules. That is why it is important to be firm in our relations. Other countries need to negotiate and respect trade rules. That is what we should do with China, but the government does not want to take a stand.

Government Orders

I hope that this bill will have an impact and that it will help improve trade relations with Madagascar. I hope that this treaty will not be a one-way deal.

• (1605)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, tax treaties and trade agreements are important things on the international scene and the federal government needs to be proactive on them. By doing that, we enhance Canada's economy, support our middle class and in fact all Canadians in all regions of the country.

I want to go specifically to the canola issue. Canola is an important industry for our prairie provinces. It is an important industry for all Canadians. The best thing the Canadian government can do is not only lobby China, but bring the science to the table. The best canola in the world is produced in western Canada, and my home province of Manitoba is an excellent example of that.

What we need to do, beyond a shadow of a doubt, is what we have done time and again, which is demonstrate very clearly to the Chinese government that the science is there, that our canola is a world-class product and to say otherwise is just not true.

Would the member acknowledge that this is not the first time we have had issues related to China? Issues related to trade with China even occurred during Stephen Harper's time.

We have to allow the professional civil servants, the scientists, to be at the forefront, and that does not happen overnight, with the snap of a finger. It takes time. We have the science to support our claims. This is the way we can support our farmers, while also ensuring them that we have their backs.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, no one is questioning the quality of Canadian canola. No one is questioning Canadian farmers' willingness to ship the best possible canola to China. The problem is that the Minister of Agriculture asked China to receive a technical delegation a month ago, and China has not responded.

We are convinced that the only people who still think that there might be a technical issue are a few Liberal members.

There is nothing wrong with our canola, yet they refuse to take a political stand. They refuse to file a complaint with the World Trade Organization to show that we are not going to take this lying down. They refuse to appoint an ambassador, which would open up a dialogue and resolve the crisis. There was a time when we had an ambassador in China who helped us get through crises.

They cannot even appoint someone to resolve the crisis. That is the problem. That is what canola farmers are asking for. That is what the organizations are asking for. They are asking the government to do more, to take a stand and to take action on both fronts, not only on the technical and scientific front, but also on the political front, so that we can cover the entire spectrum of relations with China and resolve this situation. While we are waiting, Canadian farmers are paying the price, a high price, for the Liberals' wait-and-see approach.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I wanted to tell my colleague that we agree on the issue of Madagascar, but the Liberal government also made arrangements with the Cook Islands, Antigua and Barbuda, and Grenada. These are three well-known tax havens with a near-zero tax rate.

Does my colleague feel comfortable about the Liberals signing all these treaties with tax havens?

What does he think about all the treaties that the former Harper government also signed with tax havens? Each year, they cost us tens of billions of dollars that should go to improving the quality of life and well-being of all Canadians, but that money falls through the cracks of our extremely unfair tax system.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, I think that, first and foremost, if we want healthy international relations, we need treaties. We need treaties to hunt down tax evaders. If there are no treaties, we cannot hunt down tax evaders, because we will not have the means to retrieve the money from where it is hidden. That is why it is important to have treaties, so we can take further steps.

Once the treaties are signed, if there are improvements to be made, we will make them. However, we cannot recover money from places where tax evaders go unless we have a treaty that allows us to do so. That is the basis for international relations. We need a treaty first, so we can recover money from people who flout the standards we set together.

• (1610)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. Obviously, treaties with Madagascar and its people are important for our economy.

In his speech, my colleague mentioned the canola crisis. We worked together on this issue, but we may not have had the same vision as to the best way of resolving the situation. However, let us look at what the Conservatives are proposing as an alternative. They supported market instability in foreign countries. We know that the leader of the official opposition is pro-Brexit, a process that caused considerable instability in England.

We also know that the leader of the official opposition does not want to enter into a free trade agreement with China. What a great message to send to China about trade relations. He is also opposed to the presence of Huawei in Canada, although he is unfamiliar with the details of the study.

What message does a national strategy like that send to the Chinese when we want to negotiate with them?

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Speaker, at least we have a strategy and a position. The Liberals have no position.

Private Members' Business

Let's talk about the Liberal international relations strategy. The infamous trip to India is the perfect example of how to destroy international relations and Canada's image abroad. It is the perfect way to lose all credibility in seeking to establish trade relationships with other countries.

Ever since that trip, nobody takes us seriously. China, Vietnam and Italy are walking all over us. Everyone thinks they can walk all over us because, as far as the Liberals are concerned, international relations are all about image and not about substance and taking positions. While the Liberals bide their time so as not to offend, Canadian canola producers have to pay the price.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

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.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I suspect if you were to canvass the House, you would find unanimous consent to see the clock as 5:30 p.m.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Accordingly, the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

FRAUD AGAINST SENIORS

The House resumed from March 18 consideration of the motion.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, it is with special interest that I rise to speak to Motion No. 203 regarding fraud against seniors. The reason I say that is because my riding, Trois-Rivières, has a unique feature. It is one of the rare ridings, if not the only riding in Quebec and Canada, where people stay young at heart longer than the national average.

If you look at the Quebec averages for people aged 65 and older, the riding of Trois-Rivières is a whole six or seven points above the national average. This issue, this population and my constituents aged 65 and older are near and dear to my heart. I am quite anxious to speak to this motion because it affects them directly, for a number of reasons. I will expand on that later in my speech.

I hate to date myself, but back in the day, when we had mail instead of emails, it was pretty easy to see that some things were too good to be true. My parents subscribed to Reader's Digest, which

could be found in every possible waiting room, including at the doctor, at the dentist, and in many private residences. I suspect that, even back then, they were selling subscription lists to all kinds of companies. We therefore often received tickets for sweepstakes, giving us a chance to win ridiculous sums of money if we returned all the necessary documents, which my parents and I never did.

These types of schemes have gone digital. Today, there are many offers on the Internet. You can win astronomical amounts of money, trips abroad, computers or all kinds of goods. We know that this can be questionable advertising or even fraud, which we must protect ourselves against.

I would like to give you an idea of the extent of Internet fraud, which affects seniors in particular. In fact, that is why we are discussing the issue. We are talking about \$10 billion a year, which is an astronomical sum. On a per capita basis this amounts to \$300 per person. Every Canadian could potentially be defrauded to the tune of \$300 a year. We know that is not the case. Fraudsters always target the most vulnerable people. The amount of \$300 per Canadian is not accurate. The amount is much higher for those who are victims of a well-organized fraud ring.

Statistics show that 44% of the people interviewed by the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre were directly defrauded or a member of their family was. Everyone is aware of the problem. That said, when discussing such statistics, it bears remembering that statistics can be misleading.

People who are ripped off can feel naive or simple-minded. It is important to remember that the strategies used by fraudsters are increasingly sophisticated. They elicit feelings of concern in their targets, who fall for the scam because they think they are doing the right thing. When people realize that they have been scammed, they do not boast about it. Very few people admit that they did not pay enough attention and failed to identify all of the telltale signs of fraud. On this information alone, it is safe to assume that the actual figure is probably much higher than what the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre is reporting.

Today, seniors make up 13% of the population. In 2036, they will make up 25% of the population. At the rate things are going, 2036 might as well be tomorrow.

I would like to mention another statistic before approaching this captivating subject from another angle. Earlier, I was saying that fraudsters target the most vulnerable individuals.

● (1615)

Often, people with low incomes are among the most affected, for all sorts of reasons I will explain later. Let us look at our \$300 per Canadian, a figure that does not make sense, because not everyone is targeted equally. Moreover, the people who are most often scammed are those who are the most vulnerable and who have the lowest incomes. It is a big problem.

Private Members' Business

In 1995, low-income seniors made up 3.9% of the population, so say almost 4%. In 2000, they made up 7.6% of the population, or almost 8%. According to the most recent figures, they made up 11% of the population in 2013. I see absolutely no indication that the situation has gotten any better in 2019. We can see it. The wealth we create in our country is always very poorly distributed. The rich become richer while those who struggle to make ends meet continue to bear the burden, unable to live the dream that our consumer society urges us to pursue.

Oftentimes, this aging population—or rather, as I said earlier, those who stay young at heart longer—is subject to a number of factors that make it increasingly vulnerable. In practical terms, we call these the social determinants of health. What are the social determinants of health? There is a person's economic situation, which I mentioned earlier. There are also health problems. We know that we are living longer, but not necessarily in good health. Dementia-related diseases are on the rise. We see the effects of Alzheimer's disease and others that are more likely to affect seniors and that make them more susceptible to potential Internet fraud.

Illiteracy is also a very serious problem. We often hear about functional illiteracy. This relates to people who went to school, sometimes to the end of primary school or high school. They sometimes even have a high school or college diploma, but they might not necessarily grasp all the subtleties of a text in their daily lives. Believe me, fraudsters are masters at writing up offers and putting the right images on websites that look entirely credible, if one does not have the resources needed to look further than the image presented and do the necessary comparisons. For instance, we often use the connection rate to claim that, since 80% of Canadians have Internet access, that means almost everyone in Canada can be reached online.

Successive Conservative and Liberal governments have counted on the fact that, since the government is online, every Canadian can find answers to their questions on government websites. I am sure that, like me, many members have had the experience of navigating various government websites on behalf of their constituents. As many will have seen, just because the site exists and the answer is there somewhere, does not mean it is easy to find. It takes skills that go well beyond simply having Internet access.

We are being told that the Canada Revenue Agency has plenty of online resources to help prevent fraud. Once again, the solutions being provided fail to meet the needs of the vulnerable populations we are seeking to protect. We could also talk about proficiency in English.

I will conclude by saying that, for a long time now, the NDP has been advocating for a national strategy on seniors that does more to protect seniors against fraud.

I will certainly support this motion in the hopes that we will eventually go even further.

• (1620)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. It is my duty pursuant 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 Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke,

Justice; the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, The Environment; the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Seniors.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

• (1625)

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank and congratulate my colleague from Richmond Centre for this worthwhile motion, which comes at the right time for seniors. They are happy to know that their elected officials in Ottawa care about their well-being and are thinking about them.

I want to read out the motion so that those watching at home can understand what we are debating today. My colleague from Richmond Centre moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) recognize the disproportionate effect of fraud activities against the seniors community across Canada; (b) coordinate a national response to fraud activities to ensure that seniors and other vulnerable groups have the resources they need to understand the signs of fraud; (c) establish tangible recourses for victims of fraud; and (d) work with local law enforcement agencies and the Canada Revenue Agency to introduce legislation to combat fraudulent attacks targeting vulnerable seniors.

This motion is absolutely essential. Not a week goes by without a vulnerable person becoming a victim of fraud. With the advent of the Internet and various increasingly accessible modes of communication, it is becoming easier all the time for bad people to target seniors with their schemes.

I recently read a report that said that all types of fraud, including fraud against seniors, were on the rise. There is one fraud that everyone has heard of. We all received a message this year from the Canada Revenue Agency saying that a \$200 tax refund was waiting for us if we just sent our bank account number. Seniors are vulnerable, but these messages are so sophisticated that in five years, the total amount of money taken from victims went from \$300,000 to more than \$6.4 million a year. That is money being taken from vulnerable people and all those who fell for the scam. From 2014 to 2018, the number of Canadians who were tricked went up tenfold. If the trend continues, these numbers will increase even more.

If Canadians from all walks of life are being fooled by people who are able to manipulate these messages on the Internet, I can only imagine how difficult it must be for seniors to separate fact from fiction when they are just beginning to understand the joys of new telecommunications services, the Internet and computers.

There are many cases of Internet fraud, of course, but that is not the only kind of fraud. It is important to mention that. There are people who take undue advantage of their interactions with seniors to abuse their trust and steal their hard-earned life savings. La Presse reported on an 89-year-old Montrealer who said that he was shocked to discover that all of his \$360,000 savings had disappeared from his bank account. The money had been taken by someone close to him, someone he knew very well.

Private Members' Business

Fortunately, that case is before the courts, but it takes a lot of courage and energy for seniors to go to court and speak out about these situations. That is not what seniors want to be doing at their age. They want to be using the money they saved and enjoying their retirement, but some of them lose everything overnight because somebody, somewhere, took advantage of their trust.

Often, these seniors do not realize that they have been the victims of fraud until it is too late and they have nothing left in their bank account, because the people who were put in charge of looking after their money are the ones defrauding them and taking advantage of them. It is completely unacceptable for people to take advantage of vulnerable seniors for their own gain.

• (1630)

I will not list off examples right now, but I imagine that we have all, at some point, witnessed things that seem relatively minor. It is not always \$360,000. Sometimes, a grandson or a supposed grandson might put undue pressure on a senior to help out with just \$5,000 or \$2,000.

Grandparent scams are becoming more and more common, and we hear about them a lot. Someone calls a senior and passes himself off as one of the senior's grandsons. Everyone knows some grandmothers have a lot of grandsons. People used to have lots of kids. Some grandmas might have had 16 kids, and if those kids each had 16 kids, grandma might well have 72 grandsons.

Maybe grandma gets a call from Thomas, who says he is stuck in Mexico and cannot leave and desperately needs \$2,000 to get back to Canada. Maybe someone used grandma's kid's Facebook account to come up with enough names to pass for the grandson. Naturally, grandma does not want to leave her grandson stranded all alone in Mexico because he got mixed up in something criminal or got into a fight or whatever.

Grandma wants to help. That is why we love our grandmas. Unfortunately, some people have made a fortune passing themselves off as grandsons because seniors live alone, they might not be well off, nobody takes care of them, nobody protects them, nobody looks out for them and nobody makes sure they know what they need to know.

The fact is, these scam artists are fearless and unscrupulous. Wherever they look, they see potential victims, people they can rip off.

There are people in seniors' homes who steal credit cards that are up for renewal. They have access to all of the seniors' information. It is easy for them to call the credit card company and request a new PIN, since they have access to all of the information the bank will ask for before changing the PIN.

It is scary how many ways there are to abuse people who are trusting.

There are a couple of lines in the La Presse article I mentioned that I must talk about before I wind up. The Montreal police offered advice to seniors to help reduce the risk of fraud. I said "reduce" because it is impossible to eliminate fraud entirely.

The first tip is to never disclose personal information to support staff in their home. They must also never give personal information to someone who is working around them. Personal information can be given through a well-known and trusted loved one, although, once again, we are only talking about reducing risk.

Furthermore, seniors should never disclose personal information, such as bank account numbers or social insurance numbers, via email or text message. This information should not be given out over the phone either.

It is important to shred any documents containing personal information. That is how people in positions of trust get the information they need to access seniors' bank accounts.

Seniors also need to memorize their personal identification number and never write it on their card. All too often, people write their PIN on the card. Seniors should never tell anyone their PIN, even if they are getting someone to do their shopping for them. If they give someone their PIN, they are giving them access to their bank account.

It is important for seniors to keep their chequebook in a safe place, not in the same place as their identification.

Those are just a few simple tips. Every police force, whether in my riding or in Montreal, is trying to do more to increase awareness.

However, I think we need to go even further. That is why I am grateful to my colleague from Richmond Centre for moving this motion. I hope that it will go further and that the Canada Revenue Agency will take all necessary steps to reduce fraud against seniors as much as possible.

• (1635)

[*English*]

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is my great pleasure to take part in this debate on Motion No. 203. In fact this motion, which was tabled by the hon. member for Richmond Centre, is directly in line with our government's current priorities relating to seniors.

Like all Canadians, the federal government is committed to ensuring the health and well-being of Canadian seniors. The very fact that the Prime Minister appointed a Minister of Seniors last year is a very good example of this commitment. I would even add that it is our duty as parliamentarians and as citizens to support seniors. Rest assured that we are committed to ensuring that Canadian seniors and future retirees have greater security and a better quality of life.

In fact, the government has implemented several measures over the last three years to ensure the financial security of seniors. First, we have restored the age of eligibility for the old age security pension and the guaranteed income supplement from 67 years to 65 years. This measure alone prevented approximately 100,000 seniors from falling into poverty.

Private Members' Business

There is also the fact that we increased the guaranteed income supplement by \$947 per year for low-income seniors who live alone. For some people, \$947 per year does not seem like a lot, but for seniors who are living at or below the poverty line, this money can make all the difference covering the cost of their rent, groceries or any other basic needs. This increase in the guaranteed income supplement helped nearly 900,000 low-income seniors improve their financial situations.

We have also worked closely with the provinces to improve the Canada Pension Plan. To ensure seniors have a financially comfortable retirement, we have diversified and simplified our methods, particularly online, to give seniors several ways to access their benefits. For example, seniors will soon be able to submit a single application to have access to both their old age security benefits and their guaranteed income supplement.

Budget 2019 proposes to support low-income Canadian seniors who choose to stay in the labour market and to support seniors' participation and inclusion in their communities. In fact, in budget 2019 the government is proposing a series of measures that aim to improve the quality of life for Canadian seniors.

For example, the budget suggests passing new legislation that would considerably improve the guaranteed income supplement earnings exemption as of July 2020.

This legislation would extend eligibility for the earnings exemption to income from self-employed work and would give a total or partial exemption to annual employment and self-employment income of up to \$15,000.

Budget 2019 also proposes legislative changes that aim to proactively register contributors to the Canada Pension Plan who will be 70 years of age or older in 2020 but who have not yet applied to receive their retirement benefits.

Another interesting proposal in this budget is the increase in funding for the new horizons for seniors program that addresses issues such as elder abuse, which would include financial abuse. The result would be an additional \$100 million over five years and \$20 million per year ongoing to support projects that improve quality of life for seniors and promote their full participation in society.

What is more, the government is committed to protecting Canadians' pensions. As a result, budget 2019 proposes legislative changes to the Companies' Creditors Arrangements Act, the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, the Canada Business Corporations Act and the Pension Benefits Standards Act, 1985. These changes would help better protect pension plans offered by employers in the event that a company becomes insolvent.

• (1640)

We are also proposing to provide \$12.5 million over 10 years to the Global Risk Institute so it can continue its work on developing new approaches in financial risk management. The budget also proposes to provide \$150,000 over three years to the institute's National Pension Hub to support pension research on improving the retirement savings results for Canadians and the development of solutions to challenges related to pensions.

What is more, budget 2019 proposes to invest \$35 million in 2019 and 2020 so that the assisted living program continues to meet the needs of seniors and people with disabilities who are living on a reserve.

In addition, the recent budget proposes to develop new legislation that will require the federal government to maintain a national housing strategy that prioritizes housing for the most vulnerable people, including our seniors.

Finally, in this budget we are confirming our commitment to moving forward with a bill to reduce poverty.

In conclusion, the government supports Motion No. 203, which firmly condemns fraudulent activity against seniors.

Let me be clear: Any type of violence toward seniors must be denounced and fought wherever it exists—not only physical or psychological violence, but also the insidious violence that is the financial abuse of seniors.

Of course, scammers have victims in every segment of the population, without discrimination. However, when they target seniors, especially the most vulnerable seniors, this becomes particularly despicable and completely inexcusable.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today on Motion No. 203, a motion to protect seniors from fraud. I am pleased to see my colleague, the hon. member for Richmond Centre, take bold leadership in her role as the shadow minister for seniors.

Canada's seniors built this country into what it is today, and they continue to contribute through acts of volunteerism and giving of their time for the betterment of their communities. Every day we can find those in the senior demographic among the many volunteers at food banks, in coaching roles or organizing fundraisers for non-profits. Unfortunately, some seniors continue to work to stay above water so that they can make it to the end of the month.

Although I am pleased to speak on Motion No. 203, I am also disheartened at the necessity of this motion. Too often, Canadian seniors are the target of fraud. According to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre, Canadians aged 60 to 69 are most likely to fall victim to scam artists. Scam artists can be a neighbour, a so-called friend or even family.

We are living in a digital age. It is not a rare sight to see a baby being entertained with an iPad or to see grandparents Skyping their grandchildren across the country. We all use technology. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that in this digital age, 51% of those who fall victim to things like mass marketing fraud are targeted online.

As legislators, we must take leadership to protect our most vulnerable, and I am proud to be a member of the caucus that stands up for our seniors and our most vulnerable. All of us, I am sure, would not want to see our loved ones fall for something like this, but it can happen to anyone. It is also commonplace for my constituency office to be visited by a senior who has unfortunately fallen into the trap of giving away personal information, oftentimes giving away money, and they are embarrassed by that.

Private Members' Business

I am also happy to note that the citizens of Barrie—Innisfil can expect an information pamphlet on CRA tax scams. It will land at their door either this week or next. I have sent it to every household in the riding. It will outline measures to recognize and prevent fraud.

It is important to know that there are many myths surrounding those who are targeted and fall victim to fraud. It is a common myth that mass market fraud targets those with lower levels of education. This is simply not the case. According to a report for Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, fraud affects victims regardless of their level of education. It is also wrong to assume that the wealthy are more likely to be victims of fraud; nobody is immune. Besides actions against fraudsters, it is also important that the public, especially our seniors, be aware of and know the signs of fraud.

I would also like to highlight and applaud the work of the Barrie Police Service and the South Simcoe Police Service on their work and initiatives to educate our seniors about the different types of fraud. Sandycove Acres holds a seniors academy at which the South Simcoe Police come in and talk to residents in Sandycove Acres about how to prevent themselves from falling victim to fraud.

Three weeks ago I visited seniors homes to talk about seniors and to listen to their concerns. I also highlighted the importance of recognizing and preventing fraud and described how our office could help.

I must give credit, though, because we cannot overestimate just how smart these fraudsters are. As technology evolves and new methods of combatting fraud are put into force, fraudsters will always find new methods and new lines of attack. In my capacity as a member of Parliament, I am fortunate to speak with law enforcement officers, who always highlight the importance of the evolution of methods to combat fraud. Unfortunately, I hear over and over again that legislation has not changed or evolved.

If we look at combatting fraud through a legislative lens, we see that Canada is surely behind. I have spoken to numerous officers who say they struggle to find the tools needed to prevent and combat fraud, not only against seniors but also in terms of protecting children and other vulnerable citizens online.

I would like to highlight the improvements the previous Conservative government has made in the lives of our seniors.

It is astonishing to know that abuse happens to an estimated 4% to 10% of older adults in Canada. This includes frauds against seniors. Even more alarming, only one in five instances of elder abuse is reported.

●(1645)

In January of 2013, the Protecting Canada's Seniors Act was put into force. This amended the Criminal Code of Canada, which took age into consideration for criminal sentencing purposes.

In the 2014 budget, we also stood for victims, especially our seniors, by passing the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights.

The Conservatives have always stood behind seniors. The work the hon. member for Richmond Centre has done on their behalf is immeasurable. Under her guidance and the work of many in the

previous government, the Conservatives have not only made strides in protecting our seniors, but leaving more money in their pockets as well. The previous Conservative government introduced measures like the age credit, the pension income tax credit, pension income splitting, as well as raising awareness and increasing digital and financial literacy.

Since seniors are our fastest growing demographic right now, it is also important that we build on the previous government's commitments to seniors, especially with respect to protecting elder abuse and fraud.

Once again, I am thankful for the South Simcoe Police Service and the Barrie Police Service, which, day after day, ensure that our seniors are protected against the evils that lurk behind those screens and also work so hard to bring justice to those who choose to harm our elderly.

I am looking forward to the motion being passed by the House and working with all hon. colleagues to protect those who mean the most to us, our seniors.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise to talk about a very important issue to many of my constituents. A person does not have to be a senior to appreciate what we are debating this afternoon.

We have recognized very clearly in many debates that senior abuse is very real. It happens every day in all our communities. There is a responsibility for legislators and organizations, whether they are non-profits, stakeholders or individuals, to play an educational, supportive and advocacy role in this.

I will take this opportunity to share some of the concerns I have. As a government, we have done some fairly significant things in recent years which will make a difference.

Before I mention specific examples of that, I want to acknowledge Age and Opportunity, an organization in the province of Manitoba. It has been serving seniors for decades. Organizations like this do very fine work. The new horizons program has been incorporated into the regular, ongoing activities of senior groups, highlighting the many different types of abuses. They call for action in many different ways, whether for governments, individuals or other stakeholders, and the note things we can do to assist in education.

The previous speaker made reference to using mailings to provide awareness and education regarding abuse. I applaud those types of mailers. On occasion, I have inserted things that I believe are important into mailers. Given the new general mailing formats, the member across the way made me think that maybe we could incorporate the types of things we should caution seniors about in a booklet. Far too often they are victims of some form of scam, and we need to do more to prevent this.

Private Members' Business

However, this is not just about the government in Ottawa. There is a responsibility for the various levels of government to work together in coming up with solutions that will have a real, tangible impact on our seniors.

I was very happy that the Prime Minister decided to establish a ministry for seniors, indicating very clearly that this is a very important issue. The Minister of Seniors, who is the first minister in this portfolio, has done an outstanding job in reaching into the many different communities within Canada. The diversity among our seniors is truly amazing. As a minister, she has reached out and listened to the issues related to seniors for whom we need to stand up. The issue of abuse is very real and tangible.

We talk of mental abuse, physical abuse and financial abuse. Those three take place on a daily basis, and it is quite sad. I have had opportunities to provide help and support to victims, which I do wherever I can. However, there are far too many victims. The ones who are often affected are seniors who still live in their homes. Individuals will approach their homes, maybe to take a look at the roof or a window, and they will knock on the door. A high pressure sales pitch is then given to them and repairs are made to their homes. Some of those repairs are very questionable. Some of the invoicing is very questionable.

• (1650)

Many companies in our communities have fantastic reputations. This is why it is important for us not to paint every company or industry with the same brush.

There is a great deal of economic activity between seniors and the private sector, but there will always be some individuals who have no problem taking financial advantage of seniors. Home repairs is only one example of it.

Other situations often include a child of an elderly person who will borrow or take money from that aging parent. Sadly, this type of abuse exists.

Then there is physical abuse of elders. When I think of physical abuse within society, it unfortunately often involves seniors who have literally shut themselves off from society. They very rarely leave their homes. This is hard to imagine, given the contributions to society. This is one aspect of physical abuse.

The more obvious abuse involves some form of physical force. Some seniors are picked on. It is hard to imagine, but it does take place.

For all of those reasons and more, I think today's motion will receive significant support from members on all sides of the House. We are highlighting something to which I think Canadians can relate and believe something needs to be done.

I would caution members that the solution is not as simple as the House of Commons passing a motion or a resolution or even a piece of legislation. The solution cannot be found in appointing a minister responsible for seniors. We need to do a lot more than make gestures. We need to take tangible action. We need to really work with our communities.

We need to look at first responders and mail carriers.

We often underestimate some of the fine work of our letter carriers perform. They go into our communities, where many of them have formed a relationship with the individuals to whom they deliver mail. One of the sad things about the disappearance of door-to-door delivery is the fact that they no longer will be able to provide a sense of comfort or care to those individuals.

Whether it is those civil servants, or first responders or individuals who work in hospitals, social service and home care services, they are all on the front line and they have a fairly good understanding of what is right and what is wrong. We rely on them to ensure that the amount of abuse against seniors is minimized.

It is great when the House of Commons takes action, as is often warranted. It is critically important for us to recognize that taking action needs to go far beyond just Ottawa. Stakeholders and other levels of government need to be involved. Action involves educating, protecting and being there for our seniors in a very real way.

I appreciate the motion and look forward to the ongoing debate.

• (1655)

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a great honour to be here today to have the opportunity to rise in the House to take part in this debate on Motion No. 203, a private member's motion tabled last fall by our hon. colleague, the member for Richmond Centre. I would like to thank her for the excellent work she has done over the past few years on behalf of seniors. There is no denying the sincerity and efficacy of her commitment to this cause.

It is important to mention and thank at this time the Edmontonians in my riding of Edmonton Centre, Edmonton Strathcona and around the city who came together over a year and a half ago and put a policy resolution together that went to the provincial policy round table. It went all the way to the national conference and became a priority resolution for our government to create a minister for seniors and a ministry for seniors. Thanks to the hard work of Canadians and Edmontonians, here we are with a Minister of Seniors and a ministry for seniors.

I would like to let the member know, as well as the residents of Edmonton Centre and all Edmontonians, that our government is working on several fronts to raise public awareness about the fraud activities targeting all Canadians, including seniors.

We are deeply concerned about the financial security of Canadian seniors. Those of us who are lucky enough to have grown up with and learned from our elders know how much that contact and intergenerational learning enriches our lives. We owe a debt of gratitude to seniors and need to make sure that they can live their lives in dignity.

I think of my great-grandmother, a full-blooded Cree woman, Lucy Brenneis, who said, when she was peeling apples one day, "Randy, these hands used to skin hides, now they skin apples, and some day, the lands will return to us." I think of my great-grandmother, Mary DeRudder, of Belgian heritage, who raised many children, my great-aunts and great-uncles on my mom's side. I also think of my grandparents, Adele and Andy Brenneis.

Private Members' Business

•(1700)

[*Translation*]

I am thinking about my francophone grandparents, Adalbert and Pomela Boissonnault, who instilled in me a taste for hard work and a desire to find and follow my own path.

[*English*]

This member's motion requests, first of all, that our government "recognize the disproportionate effect of fraud activities against the seniors community in Canada".

[*Translation*]

It is very important to point out that we want to recognize the disproportionate effect of fraud activities against Canadian seniors.

[*English*]

I would like to share with the House that not only does the Government of Canada recognize the existence and scope of this scourge, but it is also taking concrete steps to fight it.

I am personally touched by this issue. Last year, my mom called me in a fit of panic. There were people on the phone threatening that the RCMP would come after her and come to her house. They demanded a \$5,000 cheque immediately. It had something to do with taxes. It seemed very credible. She told me that she did not owe any money and did not know what to do and did not want the RCMP coming to her house. I told her that it was fraud and that she did the right thing. She reached out and verified, and I told her not to pay any attention to it.

What happens to the seniors who do not have anyone to turn to? What happens to the seniors who are caught in the nefarious net of the fraudsters and the people who want to make a quick buck off Canadian seniors?

Today I would like to share an overview of key initiatives the government has already implemented to prevent and fight fraud activities against seniors.

Motion No. 203 also stipulates that the government should "coordinate a national response to fraud activities to ensure that seniors and other vulnerable groups have the resources they need to understand the signs of fraud". I am proud to affirm that the federal government is working tirelessly to develop programs, services and initiatives that enable seniors to better protect themselves from fraud.

Here are just a few examples. First, the fraud prevention forum, which comprises close to 100 public and private-sector organizations and is chaired by the Competition Bureau, is actively combatting all forms of fraud activity against seniors. At the same time, the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada has developed a strategy called strengthening seniors' financial literacy. The main objective of that strategy is to increase seniors' knowledge, skills and confidence so that they can make responsible financial decisions. To do this, the strategy aims to provide tools to combat the financial abuse of seniors.

In addition, this agency keeps Canadians informed by alerting consumers to fraud scams and suspicious sales practices.

A great organization in my riding of Edmonton Centre, the Seniors Association of Greater Edmonton, SAGE, takes these issues of protecting seniors very seriously. Anything this House or our government can do to provide organizations like SAGE with more tools to keep seniors safe is exactly the kind of work I want to be engaged in.

Our government has also intervened through legislation, with the Budget Implementation Act, 2018, No. 2, which received royal assent on December 13, 2018. It made amendments to the Bank Act and the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada Act. What these amendments will do is better promote the rights and interests of bank clients, including seniors, and ensure that rigorous standards are in place to protect consumers in the banking sector.

The government also asked the National Seniors Council, which advises the Minister of Seniors and the Minister of Health, to address the issue. The council recently held a round table of experts and a general meeting in Winnipeg to identify promising practices and to discuss new measures to reduce crime and financial abuse against seniors. Using the information gathered, an analysis of federal initiatives has already been implemented. The council is currently developing advice for the ministers on action the Government of Canada could take to fight the financial abuse of seniors.

In terms of recourse for seniors, Motion No. 203 requests that the government establish tangible recourse for victims of fraud. Fraud and theft are infractions under the Criminal Code and could be subject to prosecution. Canadians are invited to report any type of fraud when they fall victim to it or when they witness it. The Competition Bureau also produces a brochure, "The Little Black Book of Scams", that provides an overview of the steps for victims to take based on that type of scam. Anyone who is listening who has not seen "The Little Black Book of Scams" can go to the Competition Bureau website and look it up, because it is a helpful reference. In that regard, the Government of Canada is deeply concerned about the fact that every year thousands of Canadians fall victim to telephone scams and are targeted by unscrupulous scammers, as was my mom.

Too many Canadians lose thousands of dollars through such rackets, which are carried out through the mail, door to door, by email and through other tricks. These fraud activities have many victims in every segment of the population, and unfortunately, as we know, many of these victims are seniors. That is why we are taking concrete steps to prevent fraud.

The motion from the member for Richmond Centre indicates that the government should work with local law enforcement agencies and the Canada Revenue Agency to introduce legislation to combat fraudulent attacks targeting vulnerable seniors. Fraudsters are very good at fooling people by offering miracle drugs, fake lotteries and get-rich-quick schemes or by turning to emotional harassment. They sometimes pass themselves off as banking institutions, insurance companies or, as I mentioned earlier, even the Canada Revenue Agency to swindle money from honest, hard-working seniors and other Canadians.

Private Members' Business

That is why the Government of Canada introduced a series of measures aimed at increasing awareness among Canadians about this ever-growing scourge. One example is an ad campaign launched late last year, running into the spring, aimed at informing seniors about services and programs for them, including anti-fraud measures and how to prevent and report fraud.

The government is tackling the problem. The Canada Revenue Agency is taking action. This is what we promised and what we are debating here in Motion No. 203. The agency's regional offices are also working closely with community organizations, police forces and local seniors associations on organizing awareness-raising activities in this regard. As part of their work, law enforcement is on their side. We can all do more.

We are all committed to ensuring the well-being of Canadian seniors, which, of course, includes their financial security. They are the people who built our country, who shaped our values and who determined how we would come to be one of the best countries in the world.

● (1705)

[Translation]

It is our duty to protect seniors from fraud and to do everything we can to help them.

[English]

We are here to support, promote and protect seniors. That is what this motion and this House are all about.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Motion No. 203. I would like to thank the hon. member for Richmond Centre for tabling this motion. She has done great work for seniors over the past few years. We cannot deny her commitment to improving their lives.

This is a topic that I know is close to the hearts of many Canadians. The mistreatment and abuse of seniors is an offence that is absolutely unacceptable, and not taking action to protect our seniors and to give them tools to protect themselves against this abuse would be unacceptable as well.

Our government recognizes the significant contributions our nation's seniors have made to our communities, our families and our workplaces. We are working thoroughly to ensure that seniors are protected from such practices and scams.

In my riding of Brampton South, there are some wonderful organizations that do wonderful work to improve the lives of all seniors in Brampton. These organizations also do a lot to raise awareness about the problems faced by seniors, which is why I am well aware of the harm fraud does to them.

As I said, Motion No. 203 falls in line with our government's priorities for seniors, and the Liberals are happy to support it. Some parts of this motion are reflected in the mandate commitments of the Minister of Seniors, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development and the Minister of Public Safety.

Our government has been committed to giving seniors a respectable and secure retirement. We have also worked on several

initiatives to prevent elder fraud from occurring and to raise awareness of this quiet and terrible trend. For example, we strongly support the new horizons for seniors program, which supports projects that improve the quality of life for Canada's vulnerable seniors and creates more opportunities for seniors to be active in their communities. The program also has the goal of tackling elder abuse and elder fraud. Through budget 2019, we will be adding an additional \$100 million over five years, or \$20 million per year, for this program. Fraud, especially in the digital world, affects all groups, but seniors, in particular, a lot.

● (1710)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Richmond Centre has five minutes for right of reply.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very excited to once again rise in this place to speak to Motion No. 203, a motion to combat seniors fraud.

Before I start, I would like to acknowledge once again the contributions of my dear colleague, the member for Langley—Aldergrove. Here, Madam Speaker, I would like to seek your special permission to mention his name. He is Mark Warawa. His passion in helping seniors and their families cannot be understated. I am thankful to be able to say that this is a passion we share, especially when it comes to the need for palliative care and the very serious issue of fraud against seniors.

To illustrate how prevalent seniors fraud has become across Canada, I want to highlight an example that has occurred since the last time I rose to speak in this place two months ago. In my home province of British Columbia, Cranbrook RCMP issued a warning to seniors about a scammer targeting local seniors over the phone, pretending to be a bank employee. This fraudster fakes a conversation, tricks the victim into thinking the phone is hung up by playing a fake dial tone, and then waits for the senior to immediately call back.

The senior, who believes he is dealing with a bank directly, is then persuaded to provide his personal banking information to the scammer. The authorities in Vancouver are also investigating the same scam, as it is thought that over \$3 million has been stolen in this way from a number of separate individuals.

Far too often, seniors who are taken advantage of refuse to contact authorities, either out of a sense of bruised pride or out of a sense of not wanting to be a burden to others. I cannot stress this enough: If seniors are targets of attempted or actual fraud, they should go to the authorities. Not only are these seniors helping themselves, but they are helping dozens of future potential victims as well.

Adjournment Proceedings

A recent case in Hamilton highlights the benefits of going to the police. When a senior was targeted by an international fraudster running a fake lottery scam, she had the forethought to take meticulous notes during the entire process, as a precaution. After she became aware that the fraud had taken place, she contacted the authorities, which in turn led to a relatively rare instance of a transnational fraud investigation. In this recent example, Jamaican authorities came to Canada as part of their own internal investigation.

We can talk about lofty, high-level policy changes and amendments to legislation, but we have to fully appreciate the human element as well. I could go on for hours listing specific cases of seniors fraud in Canada, from ridings in all provinces and members from all parties. This is why it is absolutely critical for us to stand in this place to acknowledge the growing number of fraud cases against the seniors community.

It is important that we not only acknowledge that but also coordinate a national response to this threat, establish tangible resources for these victims, and work with law enforcement agencies and other interested groups to bring in actual legislative changes.

On this point, I would like to thank my Conservative colleague from Yellowhead for introducing his private member's bill, Bill C-206, an act to amend the Criminal Code (abuse of vulnerable persons).

• (1715)

While the bill has a greater scope than just seniors, it is a perfect example of one of the steps we as members need to take to address this abuse against seniors.

The seniors of this nation have spent their entire lives—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I hate to interrupt. Unfortunately, the time is up.

Hon. Alice Wong: Madam Speaker, I look forward to the support of Motion No. 203 by my colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

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.

An hon. member: On division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

JUSTICE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, veterans and their families deserve better. Since the

Liberal Party stole power in the 2015 election, there have been four and a half veterans affairs ministers, including the time the portfolio was reduced to a part-time position. Even the Toronto Star calls the portfolio “a revolving door”, though it seems more like a trap door for government MPs who have fallen in disfavour with the ruling clique, like the former justice minister.

The Liberal Party has traditionally used the veterans portfolio as a dumping ground. Canadians remember all too well when the hapless John McCallum, who sent soldiers to Afghanistan lacking the proper equipment, was dumped out of the defence portfolio and into Veterans Affairs. His mistreatment of veterans landed him with a final reward as ambassador to China. Canadians across the country are paying the price for his failures there.

We know how the current Liberal Party leader feels about veterans after he told a veteran in Edmonton that veterans are asking for too much. That comment is rich coming from the Liberal Party, which gave \$10.5 million to convicted terrorist Omar Khadr. All veterans are asking for is what was promised to them.

I know that some Liberal Party MPs, particularly those with prior military service, are in denial when it comes to their government's mistreatment of veterans.

I am now reading into Hansard a letter I received from a veteran, a retired sergeant major, which sums up the feelings of veterans who are contacting my office on a daily basis.

It states, “We're pretty much using the same failing strategy as we did in the mid-1800s. Boots are still an issue and our Navy just 'isn't'—we have some good equipment for the Army because they needed it so desperately when they didn't have it to fight a War we sent our troops to.

“The RCAF has just purchased museum quality jets from Australia and the Canadian Government tried to railroad a Vice Admiral for doing his job.

“We don't contribute our share to NATO and try our best to annoy the strongest democratic country on the planet and our closest neighbour just for good measure.

“The legacy of the injured from Afghanistan and the unit designed to transition them (the Joint Personnel Support Unit [JPSU]) has been the cause of incredible stress among injured and transitioning military families, only getting to its functional point in a year or so—six years after the conclusion of hostilities.

“The current Government and Canadian Armed Forces leadership is acting like all the adults left Parliament Hill for the weekend and they have taken it upon themselves to run the levers of Government in their absence.

“Not knowing what they're doing, they are making an incredible mess of things while having a jolly great time of it, but this one particular Mess with our Country's Defences must be corrected—now.

“Too many people have given their futures for this beautiful Country and its people—it's time to respect their sacrifice by not allowing another circumstance to swallow another generation in the absence of adults.”

Adjournment Proceedings

On behalf of Canadians, I thank the sergeant major for his service to our country.

I asked a question in question period, which the leader of the Liberal Party was too ashamed to answer. How many taxpayer dollars were wasted wrongly prosecuting an innocent man, Vice-Admiral Mark Norman?

• (1720)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to take part in the adjournment debate this evening. My colleague raised the issue of Mr. Norman's case. As the member knows, based on last week's decision, the charges against Vice-Admiral Norman have been stayed.

As confirmed by the Public Prosecution Service of Canada last week, every decision was made completely independently. As the PPSC also indicated, no other factors were considered in this decision, nor was there any contact or influence from outside the PPSC, including political influence in either the initial decision to prosecute Mr. Norman or in the decision to stay the charge. Any accusation to the contrary is absurd.

The only other thing I will say on the matter is that, also based on last week's decision, the deputy minister has reviewed the policy in place regarding the request to have his legal fees paid as they relate to this case. She provided us with her opinion, and we agree with her. In addition, General Vance will speak with Mr. Norman about what comes next.

Since my colleague raised the topic of taxpayer dollars, I want her to know that our government is committed to having the care for our women and men of the Canadian Armed Forces at the core of everything we do. After a decade of cuts under the Harper Conservatives, we are delivering results for our women and men in uniform and their families.

Some of our measures include tax-free income for members deployed on international operations, \$155 million to safeguard the digital privacy and security of Canadians, \$198 million to improve access to health care and implement a joint suicide prevention strategy, and \$6 million per year in new funding to military family resource centres, which means more child care hours. I had the opportunity to visit one of those centres in my province, New Brunswick, and they do amazing work. I thank them for the work they do for our men and women in uniform.

Our government is re-engaging on the world stage and getting our women and men in uniform the equipment they need. That is why budget 2019 is supporting important measures for our Canadian Armed Forces, namely close to \$19 million in support of Canadian Armed Forces members transitioning over to civilian life.

Unlike the previous government, which cut defence funding, our government is returning Canada to a leadership role internationally. We are achieving this through our defence policy, "Strong, Secure, Engaged". We have committed to increasing defence spending by more than 70% over the next 10 years. That is in stark contrast to the Conservatives' record.

Unlike the previous government, which repeatedly cut funding to the military, and unlike the Leader of the Opposition's most recent vision, which is, as usual, without specifics, our government has rigorously costed its policy at more than \$32 billion.

What is disappointing, however, is how the Conservatives have repeatedly voted against making the funding available to implement our policy and provide the Canadian Armed Forces with the resources they need. The Conservatives spent dozens of hours voting against funding the very operations we send our members of the Canadian Armed Forces on.

Despite Conservative voting against funding its protection, Canadians can continue to rely on our strong electoral process, and a strong military.

In closing, I would like to thank the members of the Canadian Armed Forces for the work they do every day for Canadians.

• (1725)

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, how many taxpayer dollars were wasted wrongly prosecuting an innocent man, Vice-Admiral Mark Norman?

Considering the fact that Vice-Admiral Norman was forced to rack up nearly half a million dollars in legal fees to defend himself, I have no doubt that millions were wasted on the Liberal Party's witch hunt of an honourable gentleman. The money wasted should have been used to meet the government's obligation to a veteran, retired Warrant Officer Roger Perreault, for the critical injury benefit he deserves for injuries sustained serving his country in Afghanistan. Veterans and their families deserve better.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier: Madam Speaker, as we have said over and over, no other factors were considered in this decision, nor was there any outside contact or influence, political or otherwise. Based on the decision, the deputy minister has reviewed the policy in place regarding Vice-Admiral Norman's request to have his legal fees paid for as it relates to this case. We will take her advice.

It makes me chuckle to hear a Conservative member talk about helping veterans, since we know just how much the Conservatives cut from veterans services. They shut down offices that provided support to veterans, and they slashed budgets at the Department of National Defence. That is the complete opposite of what we are doing.

Adjournment Proceedings

We are reinvesting in the men and women of our Canadian Armed Forces. Our defence policy puts our men and women in uniform first and provides unprecedented investments. This is in stark contrast to the previous government, which repeatedly cut funding and left the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces out in the cold.

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I am rising today to pursue a question that I asked initially in question period on March 18.

That date was only three days after the quite extraordinary Friday climate strike at schools across Canada. Schoolchildren joined millions of other children around the world on March 15 for a global school strike for the climate.

I urge those who are unfamiliar with this movement to look up Greta Thunberg, a young Swedish student, a young woman from Stockholm, who at 15 years of age started the climate strike, just by herself, sitting outside her school in Stockholm.

She is now 16 years old, and the movement has grown to such an extent that as I pointed out in my question to the Prime Minister on March 18, in Montreal 150,000 schoolchildren had marched for climate action just days before.

Let me say that again.

[*Translation*]

In Montreal, 150,000 children joined the protest, demanding action to protect our planet.

[*English*]

The Prime Minister's response was to say, "...we hear them. We are taking action.... Our plan will create a cleaner, more prosperous future for our kids and our grandkids."

It is telling that at that point the Prime Minister was not speaking the words "we are in a climate emergency". In the last 24 hours, both the Liberals and the New Democrats have put forward on the Order Paper two resolutions that I welcome, resolutions that will allow us to be able to debate and talk about the real extent of this emergency.

It is telling that the May 6 by-election in Nanaimo—Ladysmith elected a second Green member of Parliament, and I can say his name out loud because he is not yet a sworn member of Parliament. Paul Manly's election appears to have had a salutary effect on the understanding of both Liberals and New Democrats of the extent of the emergency in which we find ourselves.

What I want to suggest for the late show we have tonight is that we really should find ways to support both of the motions that will come before us on Thursday. The NDP's motion is clearly more detailed and stronger, and I certainly will vote for it. However, it is not insignificant that the Minister of Environment and Climate Change has, for the first time, put forward a motion that says we should declare that we are in a national climate emergency. In doing this, we will join other countries around the world.

I do believe that the language of "national climate emergency" focuses the mind on what the schoolchildren have been trying to tell

us: that we are not in a status quo world. Literally in a period of months, not years—and we do not have much more time than 40 months—we will have to make the decision to change course globally, to both commit in Canada and to exert leadership globally to stop using fossil fuels.

It is clear that we have to say these words out loud. We have to find transition strategies. There are workers in the oil sands with transferable skills who could do many other things that have to do with renewable energy, and as we will continue to use fossil fuels for some time further, let us use only Canadian fossil fuels and stop the imports.

We can solve the question of economic dislocation that keeps being raised, but we cannot debate physics. We cannot win an argument with science. We cannot ask science to meet us halfway. To protect our children and grandchildren, we need to acknowledge that this is a climate emergency and set the course to stop using fossil fuels.

● (1730)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her continued advocacy toward a healthier environment. As well, I extend my congratulations to Mr. Manly on his victory in the recent by-election and I look forward to his taking his seat in this House.

As the hon. member knows, Canada's first ministers came together in 2016 to agree, for the first time, on a national climate plan. This plan is setting us on the path to a better future and enabling us to find new ways to improve our health, our environment and our economy for our kids and grandkids.

With respect to the enormous number of Canadian students who took part in the strike for climate action, I thank them for their advocacy and ask them to talk to their families, because it has been demonstrated that one of the most persuasive ways to encourage people to change their views on climate change is to speak with their children about it.

Our plan, the pan-Canadian framework on clean growth and climate change, includes over 50 concrete measures to make things better, more efficient and more affordable for people. My own view is that we need to do as much as we can as fast as we can, and I look forward to the debates that will be coming up over the next two days in this chamber.

Adjournment Proceedings

Since we have adopted our plan, we have worked tirelessly with our provincial and territorial partners, indigenous peoples, stakeholders and Canadians to address climate change, and we are starting to see real and meaningful progress. For example, we have new regulations to reduce methane emissions from the oil and gas sector, reduce greenhouse gas emissions from heavy-duty vehicles and accelerate the phase-out of coal-fired electricity. By 2030, 90% of our electricity in Canada will be generated from non-emitting sources. This is important.

We have released the clean fuel standard regulatory design paper for consultation. We have invested billions of dollars in clean technology, innovation and green infrastructure to drive growth in the new economy while we reduce pollution. We have established a low-carbon economy fund to finance emission reductions projects in provinces and territories and launched a suite of programs to build Canada's resilience to a changing climate, including establishing the Canadian Centre for Climate Services to improve access to authoritative climate science and information.

The hon. member discussed the importance of relying on science. The great thing about it is that it is right whether we believe it or not, no matter the disagreement we have in this chamber. Of course, we have put a price on pollution across Canada, reducing our emissions by 50 million to 60 million tonnes by 2022. It is also going to help drive innovation in the clean-growth sector.

Our most recent emissions projections indicate that emissions in 2030 will be 223 million tonnes lower than what was projected prior to the creation of our climate plan. When it is fully implemented, it will not only allow Canada to meet the target it set for 2030, but position us to set and achieve deeper emissions reduction targets beyond 2030 that we know we need to achieve.

Canadians are asking us to do even more, and that is why we have created an advisory council on climate action to provide advice on how we can further reduce emissions from transportation and buildings. That is why budget 2019 included incentives for zero-emission vehicles, \$1 billion toward energy efficiency in buildings and \$5 billion to support clean electricity.

Before I wrap up, I again want to thank the hon. member for her advocacy. I look forward to the debate in the chamber so we can outline the steps that we need to take to address the climate emergency that Canada is facing.

● (1735)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, as for the list of things that Liberals have done—and credit is due for the things they have done—the bottom line is that those cumulative actions do not meet the existing target, what is called in the Paris Agreement the “nationally determined contribution”, which is Canada's target. The cumulative effort described does not meet the target, but the target is not even the Paris target. Our current target is the one left behind by Stephen Harper, and it is inconsistent with holding to no more than a 1.5° Celsius global average temperature increase, which is not a political target: It is a do-or-die target. It is what is required to hang on to human civilization.

We cannot confront a climate emergency if nation states fall apart. We cannot confront a climate emergency with billions of refugees.

The reality is that talking about doing more after 2030 is a promise to do too little way too late.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Mr. Speaker, the target that I am most concerned with is the 1.5° Celsius target that was outlined in the Paris Agreement. With respect, we are moving forward with a plan that is going to be the most ambitious climate plan that a government of Canada has ever put forward.

I outlined some of the measures, not all of which are factored into the calculation that the hon. member referred to when discussing the 2030 target. The fact is that we know Canadians expect us to do more. In 2019, Canadians are going to have a choice as to whether they want a government that continues to push the envelope or whether they are going to turn the clock back, and I hope they choose the former, not the latter.

Once again, I look forward to the debates over the next two days in this House to address the path forward to ensure that Canada is responding in a responsible way to the climate emergency facing our nation.

[*Translation*]

SENIORS

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I asked the Prime Minister to take action to help families, seniors and single people going through tough times.

Together with ACEF Montérégie-est, I recently held an informal gathering of citizens on the topic of debt. I heard from lots of people who were deep in debt. People often talk about how expensive housing is. Social housing is in short supply everywhere, not least in my riding.

Two months ago, Jean-Claude Ladouceur, executive director of the Office municipal d'habitation des Maskoutains et d'Acton, told me there are nearly 300 families on the waiting list for social housing. That barely seems possible in a riding of 100,000 people. That is not even counting all the other low-income housing providers in my riding. I met Mr. Ladouceur in February when he came out to a public event I held in Saint-Hyacinthe to talk about the social and affordable housing crisis.

I also invited Geneviève Ledoux, the director of an advocacy group called Groupe de ressources techniques de Saint-Hyacinthe, and the member for Hochelaga, the NDP's housing critic. I would like to congratulate them on the important work they are doing. I would also like to thank all the citizens who came out to express an interest in this crisis. There were over 50 of them, and some of them, especially seniors, shared their concerns with me. They told me that we need to build more social housing for families, single people and seniors. They are absolutely right. People need us to show some political courage. The NDP is ready to make courageous decisions and invest heavily in social housing.

Adjournment Proceedings

I have been in politics for a long time because I want to change people's lives. I want to improve people's lives. There are some very simple things we can do quickly to make life better for our seniors. One of those things is to make the guaranteed income supplement automatic for all seniors. As I have said many times, I do not understand why GIS payments are not automatic for all seniors. That is unacceptable to me and to the FADOQ, too.

I would like to recognize the outstanding work of the FADOQs, especially those in my riding. I am thinking for example of Serge Mathieu of the FADOQ Aquino in Saint-Hyacinthe, Fernand Beauregard of the FADOQ Saint-Dominique, Mario Gagnon of the FADOQ St-Joseph in Saint-Hyacinthe, Linda St-Pierre of the FADOQ Saint-Pie, Jean-Denis Leboeuf of the FADOQ Acton Vale, Donald Chagnon of the FADOQ St-Liboire, Laurianne Cusson of the FADOQ Saint-Théodore-D'Acton, Gérard Beaulieu of the FADOQ St-Valérien, Jo-Anne Delage of the FADOQ Ste-Christine, Jocelyne Jodoin of the FADOQ Ste-Hélène and Micheline Guérette of the FADOQ Upton. I am also thinking of all the volunteers who work with and gravitate to these FADOQ to bring seniors together. As I was saying, many of my constituents are going through hard times.

My question could not be simpler. When will the government finally help those who need it most?

• (1740)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

We are thankful for the contributions of our seniors to our communities, workplaces and families. Therefore, I am pleased to have the opportunity to remind my colleague of all that the Government of Canada has done for seniors.

[*English*]

Our government has been working for seniors since the day we were elected and we continue to take concrete measures to improve the retirement security of Canadians and ensure seniors can enjoy the fulfilling retirement they so very much deserve.

Preventing seniors from falling into poverty is high on the government's list of priorities. This includes acting on issues like income security and housing.

One of the first things we did was to restore the age of eligibility for old age security and the guaranteed income supplement to 65, keeping 100,000 seniors out of poverty. In addition, we boosted the GIS by close to \$1,000 a year for vulnerable seniors who live on their own, which is improving financial security for almost 900,000 seniors. In fact, over 4,000 seniors in my riding of Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine are benefiting from this increase.

As we all know, living a full and healthy life goes beyond financial stability. Through our health accord, we invested \$6 billion into home care and palliative care, because we knew seniors wanted to remain in their homes. We have also improved EI caregiver benefits to make it easier for Canadians to care for a family member in need.

Through budget 2019, the government is making new investments to help make retirement more financially secure for Canadians. It

proposes legislative changes to the Canada pension plan that will ensure Canadian retirees receive the full value of their pension. Starting in 2020, we will proactively register CPP contributors aged 70 and above who have not yet applied for their retirement benefits.

In budget 2019, we propose to enhance the GIS earnings exemption so seniors who wish to work can take home more of their hard-earned income.

Budget 2019 also proposes to introduce new measures to safeguard the security of workplace pensions in the event of corporate insolvency.

No senior should have to choose between paying for their medication and paying for groceries. That is why, in budget 2019, we proposed concrete steps toward the implementation of national pharmacare, helping Canadians with the cost of prescription drugs by creating the Canada drug agency and starting development of a national formulary.

As well, the national housing strategy will reduce the number of seniors in need of housing through the new \$13 billion national housing co-investment fund. The fund is expected to create at least 7,000 new affordable housing units and will support much needed renovations, including improved accessibility to allow seniors to age in their communities.

The government's mandate for seniors aims to promote healthy aging and social inclusion. Currently, the new horizons for seniors program is helping to fulfill this goal. It provides funding for community-based projects of up to \$25,000 per year, per organization or a new small grant of a maximum of \$5,000.

[*Translation*]

The program also supports larger projects across the country with funding of up to \$5 million for a maximum period of five years to improve social inclusion of seniors.

These measures are part of our long-term vision, which is to strengthen the middle class, promote sustainable growth for Canadians, and lift a greater number of Canadians, including seniors, out of poverty.

• (1745)

[*English*]

We have clearly demonstrated our commitment to improving the quality of life of Canadian seniors and we will continue to work hard for them.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, whether it is during my tours of seniors residences or when I go to the Salon de la famille this Friday, May 17, from 9:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. at Galeries St-Hyacinthe, seniors come up to me to tell me that they are having a tough time financially because their expenses are increasing whereas their income does not.

Business of Supply

That is not surprising when we know that many families, seniors, and singles spend half their income on housing. It is not surprising when drugs cost so much; when families are not fully covered for dental fees and they pay a fortune to go to the dentist; when six out of 10 Canadians are not eligible for employment insurance; when our seniors do not automatically get the guaranteed income supplement. They need it now, not in 2020.

I go door-knocking every Saturday. The past two Saturdays, I had a petition signed calling for GIS payments to be made automatically for everyone. Everyone I met signed it because they think it makes no sense that we are not already doing that.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Mr. Speaker, seniors across Canada worked their entire lives. They deserve to have confidence in the future and to feel safe where they live. They deserve housing worthy of being called home.

That is why our government came up with the first-ever national housing strategy for seniors. We are investing \$40 billion in that strategy.

[English]

Last year, the Government of Canada created Canada's first-ever national housing strategy, which will help repair and/or build 12,000 units of seniors housing.

To further support low income seniors, they will also benefit from the upcoming Canada housing benefit, which is direct funding that will help them pay for their housing costs.

As I have outlined in my speech this evening, there is no doubt that the government is committed to ensuring our programs and services are developed to address the needs of an aging population. We are devoted to providing Canadian seniors with greater security and a better quality of life.

I look forward to working with all parliamentarians in this regard.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4) the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been withdrawn and the House will now resolve itself into committee of the whole to study all votes under Department of Justice in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020.

I do now leave Chair for the House to resolve itself into committee of the whole.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE—MAIN ESTIMATES, 2019-20

(Consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under Department of Justice in the main estimates, Mr. Bruce Stanton in the chair)

The Chair: Before we get underway with tonight's committee of the whole, I just have a few instructions, some preamble, to set the guidelines for this evening's committee of the whole.

Tonight's debate is a general one on the votes under Department of Justice. The first round will begin with the official opposition, followed by the government and the New Democratic Party. After that, we will follow the usual proportional rotation.

[Translation]

Each member will be allocated 15 minutes at a time, which may be used for both debate or for posing questions. Members wishing to use this time to make a speech have a maximum of 10 minutes, which leaves at least five minutes for questions to the minister.

When a member is recognized, he or she should indicate to the Chair how the 15-minute period will be used, in other words, how much time will be spent on the speech and how much time will be used for questions and answers. Members should also note that they will need the unanimous consent of the committee to split their time with another member. When the time is to be used for questions and comments, the Chair will expect that the minister's response will reflect approximately the time taken by the question, as that time counts toward the time allocated to the party.

[English]

I also wish to indicate that in committee of the whole, comments should be addressed to the Chair. I ask for everyone's co-operation in upholding all the established standards of decorum, parliamentary language and behaviour.

We will now begin tonight's session.

The House in committee of the whole, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), consideration in committee of the whole of the votes under Department of Justice in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2020.

The hon. member for Milton.

• (1750)

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Chair, I will be using my entire 15 minutes on questions to the minister.

Has the minister brought a proposal to cabinet to give a deferred prosecution agreement to SNC-Lavalin, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Chair, as the hon. member knows, because the matter is under appeal, that is not a question I will answer because of litigation privilege and the *sub judice* rule.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, has the minister begun the process to issue a directive under the Director of Public Prosecutions Act to override the decision of the director of public prosecutions in this matter?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, my answer is the same. Anything that I can say in the House may have an impact on the proceedings before the Federal Court of Appeal.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, have any of the minister's staff members provided any employee of SNC-Lavalin with assurances that he ensured it would receive a deferred prosecution agreement prior to the election, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I am not quite sure what the hon. member means by that. I would ask her for more precision.

Business of Supply

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, I am asking the minister whether he or a member of his staff or any members of the Prime Minister's Office, now or in the future, have ever told anybody who works with or for SNC-Lavalin that it will get a deferred prosecution agreement eventually, more specifically, before the election?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, it is absurd to project into the future what people might or might not say. I can speak for myself and say that I have never had such conversations or given such an assurance.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, moving on to issues from this afternoon, in question period today the Prime Minister indicated, "We continue to respect the independence of the judiciary. We always will. Measures were brought forward against the vice-admiral at the direction of the chief of the defence staff."

Could the minister let us know whether the chief of the defence staff ordered the RCMP to lay charges?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I do not know the answer to that question. I do know that the RCMP conducts its own independent investigations and that the director of public prosecutions undertakes those prosecutions and, in this case, ordered the stay. It was before my time as Attorney General. I do not know the precise instigation for that.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, further to questions regarding the RCMP, today two members of the RCMP indicated that they would "like to get the totality of the information and do a proper analysis." In other words, they are asking for certain information to be passed to them from the federal prosecution service.

Will the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada discuss this matter with the federal prosecution service?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, the prosecution service is independent of my office, and I will not speculate on an article that appears in the newspaper.

• (1755)

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, it is more than an article that appears in the newspaper. This is a quote from the RCMP and in it the RCMP is indicating that it wishes to go back and take a look at the information that was levelled with respect to the charges against Vice-Admiral Mark Norman.

As a result, I am wondering if the minister can let us know whether he still believes this case is closed, given that the RCMP wants to go back and investigate further.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, the RCMP does not take instructions on whether to lay a charge or not. It works entirely independently of my office.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, I would like to know from the minister whether he received a section 13 notice prior to the director of public prosecutions and the Public Prosecution Service of Canada staying the charges against Vice-Admiral Mark Norman.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, that would be privileged information. It would be solicitor-client privilege. That is the way we have normally treated section 13 notices. What I can say for the hon. member, as I have stated in the House, and I know she was listening attentively, is that this case was prosecuted under the Criminal Code

and the attorney general who was responsible for the prosecution was actually the attorney general for Ontario.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the clarification. I am wondering, though, if the minister can illuminate us. Is he saying that the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada was not provided a section 13 notice pursuant to the Director of Public Prosecutions Act on the staying of the charges against Mark Norman?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, under section 13 of the act, the director of public prosecutions can, in this case and at her discretion, issue such a notice to the Attorney General of Canada when a case is in the national interest.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: That is actually not the quote, Mr. Chair. What the act actually says is that it is when the case will attract great public interest. I can think of no case that has attracted more public interest, other than SNC-Lavalin, than the case of Mark Norman.

Once again, could the minister tell me whether the director of public prosecutions provided a section 13 notice. I might as well go further to tell him what I am driving at. I would like to know whether cabinet discussed the section 13 notice under the umbrella of the Attorney General of Canada seeking advice from his colleagues.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, what I have been trying to say for the hon. member is that the act does not apply in this case.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, at the end of a press conference with respect to the staying of charges with respect to Vice-Admiral Mark Norman, counsel actually said the following, which I would like to read if I may:

There are lots of questions that need to be asked and answered about this whole process the last couple of years. And I think some people who have been involved in this need to reflect on what happened and why it happened and their role in it.

Would the minister agree that it is appropriate for him to order a commission of inquiry within his department pursuant to the Inquiries Act?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I have received a breakdown of how the justice department dealt with the third party orders for documents. I am satisfied, and the court appeared to be satisfied, that we met our obligations in that regard.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, I am going to argue with the minister on that point. I do not believe the court indicated it was satisfied. In fact, as the minister should know, the actual application was never determined. In fact, the staying of the charge came prior to the judge weighing in on it, but there is much *obiter* from the judge on her concerns about the documents and how slowly they were coming forward, if they were coming forward at all.

The minister indicated today that the department had turned over all documents that were needed. Will the minister say that once again in the House of Commons now?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, the process that was set up was set up precisely so that defence counsel could inquire and get documents from the government.

Business of Supply

The process that was set up allowed for the department of justice to receive applications for potentially responsive records. These are all kinds of records. Over 144,000 such records were identified, and eventually 8,000 documents were deemed to be potentially possible. It was ultimately the court that made that decision.

• (1800)

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, not quite. On February 22, the defence was in possession of zero documents. Would the minister agree with me on that?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, this was an extraordinarily complex case with many documents. From beginning to end, over six months, my understanding is that only 246 potentially responsive documents had yet to be reviewed when the stay happened, which meant that we complied with virtually all of the document requests.

This is a far better time frame than in many other complex cases of a similar nature.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, is the minister aware that the application for the production of these documents commenced on October 12, 2018?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, ultimately it is a judge who would order both the final manner in which the documents were redacted and the production of documents themselves. Ultimately these were decisions that were going to be made by the judge.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, would the minister agree with me that the Crown has a duty of disclosure specifically when it comes to making sure that the defence has everything it needs in order to exculpate itself if it does have the documents in its possession? Does he not agree that this is exactly what the duty of the Crown is in this matter?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, this was an extraordinarily complex case in which documents needed to be identified, and in which potential privilege could be claimed for solicitor-client privilege and for litigation privilege, as well as cabinet confidence.

Those decisions are, in the normal course of events, made by a judge. We set up a process that would allow that to happen, and I am confident that we met our obligations to the defence in this case.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, I have to go back to what the former defence attorney for Vice-Admiral Norman indicated:

No person in this country should ever walk into a courtroom and feel like they are fighting their elected government or any sort of political factors at all.

She also said:

It took months and months and months. It took six months to get documents, and as we sit here today and as we walked out of that courtroom, we still did not have all of them....

She added:

The facts are that we were required to bring an application in court that has dragged on for six months to get documents.

How can the minister indicate that he is satisfied with the work of the department in this matter?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I have said, there was a process that was put into place that would allow the documents to be identified and selected, and then they would go through to a judge as well as a civil servant to determine potential privileges that applied

to the documents. This is extraordinarily complex, and I am confident that we met our obligation for third party documents.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, is the minister aware that on two occasions media, had to go to court in order to lift bans that were asked for and placed on the court with respect to documents, first on April 21, 2017, and second on November 23, 2018?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, again, this is an extraordinarily complex case. The decisions to produce documents ultimately would lie with a judge for reasons of various kinds of confidentiality and privilege. This is a normal course of events for these kinds of documents.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, I will point out again that the minister is wrong in this case. In fact, it was the court that indicated that in the latter case, November 23, it was the Crown that decided that it would not release the documents attached to the application of October 12, and it was for no reason. In fact, the judge said that it was an open court.

I wonder if the minister could comment on why it was decided that there would be an attempt to suppress the documents attached to a duly placed motion in the court.

• (1805)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I was not minister at the time. As I have said before, I have no comment on those various comments by my hon. colleague, other than to say that I am confident that the Department of Justice did yeoman's work and completed its duty to furnish documents under the third party records application process.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, on October 12, defence counsel asked for a number of documents to be produced. They received no documents until February 22. During testimony in December 2018, it was brought to the attention that ATIP information was in fact misapplied, meaning that they were not searching for the terms under which the documents were being filed.

Second, a person who was staff to the then Minister of National Defence did not check her personal emails or her secondary personal phone or her BlackBerry device for the documents that were being sought.

Does the minister still believe that the departments did a good job in seeking these documents?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, the process that has been described to me included an identification of potentially relevant documents by the defence. These included documents on devices, and then that number was winnowed down according to relevancy, and ultimately a judge would decide.

The Chair: That will end the first speaking slot in the opening round.

We will go to the Minister of Justice, but before we do that I will just explain to hon. members that this is the only time that this occurs.

Business of Supply

In the format that we have, a member who has a speaking slot can, for a portion that they wish, up to 10 minutes, revert to questions to the minister. Since the minister himself is actually taking a speaking slot, he cannot really use five minutes to pose questions to himself. Therefore, members of his own party will have the opportunity in the portion that he leaves, which probably will be no more than five minutes, to pose questions to the minister at the point that he switches from his speech to the time for questions and comments. I hope that is understood.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will provide 10 minutes of remarks and then I will welcome questions from my parliamentary secretary, the outstanding member for Parkdale—High Park.

I would first like to recognize the Algonquin nation, on whose traditional territory we are gathering this evening.

[*Translation*]

I will briefly describe how the funding allocated in the main estimates 2019-20 will support our work at the Department of Justice.

I would like to remind the committee that the department strives to promote and maintain a fair, transparent and accessible justice system. The department also helps guide the modernization of the justice system. What is more, it provides the federal government with legal services and support.

[*English*]

The Department of Justice has a total budgetary authority of \$744.52 million through 2019-20 main estimates, which is an increase of \$46.77 million from the previous fiscal year. This additional funding is for major priorities, including but not limited to innovating and modernizing how regulations are drafted and implemented, enhancing the integrity of Canada's borders and asylum system, providing Canadians with better access to public legal aid education and information, and supporting renewed legal relationships with indigenous peoples.

Much of this year's authority will support the administration of justice and the Canadian legal framework by directing funding to the provinces and territories, with whom we share the responsibility in this important area.

The funding will also help maintain and support our bilingual and bijural national legal framework. It will also support the department's ability to transform and modernize the justice system, while protecting and promoting the rights enshrined in the Constitution and the charter.

I would like to outline some of the key funding we have received and the initiatives that it will help support.

[*Translation*]

First, we are currently conducting a comprehensive review of the criminal justice system in order to determine how effective it is in protecting Canadians. The review, which involved extensive public consultations, will also help ensure that our laws hold offenders

accountable, that they are fair and equitable, that they respect the charter and that they show compassion and support for victims.

[*English*]

This ongoing review has already helped inform the initiatives and reforms we have introduced.

For one thing, the review contributed to Bill C-75. With this bill, our government is fulfilling its promise to move forward with substantive criminal justice reforms that will have a real and lasting impact on court delays. It will help increase efficiencies and reduce delays for all those involved in the criminal justice system while respecting their rights and protecting public safety. This important legislation is now before the other place, and I look forward to seeing it passed during this Parliament.

We are deeply committed to reconciliation and to transforming our relationship with indigenous peoples.

● (1810)

[*Translation*]

The directive on civil litigation involving indigenous peoples was released in January 2019. It supports our commitment to reconciliation and rights recognition by providing advice on the approaches, positions and decisions taken in the context of civil litigation involving indigenous peoples and related issues.

I would also add that we recognize the importance of revitalizing indigenous legal systems and the important role that indigenous law institutes can play in understanding, developing and implementing indigenous laws.

[*English*]

To this end, budget 2019 proposes \$10 million over five years, starting in 2019-20, in support of indigenous law initiatives across Canada through the justice partnership and innovation program, JPIP, to improve equality for indigenous peoples in Canada's legal system. This builds on the \$9.5 million per year we already provide for the delivery of indigenous courtwork services through the indigenous courtwork program. With their knowledge of indigenous culture, language and traditions, court workers provide direct support before, during and after court proceedings.

[*Translation*]

We are also continuing our efforts to fill judicial vacancies and increase diversity in the Canadian judiciary. The appointment process for superior court justices that we introduced is more transparent, inclusive and responsible.

We have made over 300 judicial appointments since November 2015. These exceptional jurists reflect the diversity that gives Canada its strength. More than half of those judges are women, and 30% are functionally bilingual. The appointments reflect an increased representation of visible minorities, indigenous peoples, people from the LGBTQ2S community, and people who identify as living with a disability.

Business of Supply

[English]

While on the subject of diversity, it is important to highlight our continued support for protecting the rights and freedoms of the LGBTQ2S community. One example is our Bill C-16, which received royal assent in June 2017. It amended the Canadian Human Rights Act to add two prohibited grounds of discrimination: gender identity and gender expression. It also amended the Criminal Code by adding gender identity or expression to the list of identifiable groups that are protected from hate propaganda. Finally, it made clear that hatred on the basis of gender identity or expression should be considered an aggravating factor in sentencing for a criminal offence.

[Translation]

We are also very proud of Bill C-78, which is currently before the other place. The legislation seeks to modernize federal family law and put the needs of the child first.

The last time our family laws have undergone significant amendments was 20 years ago. They fail to address a number of difficult issues, including relocation and family violence. I hope the reform will pass quickly.

[English]

Completing this legislation is our expansion of unified family courts. In budget 2018, our government funded the creation of 39 new judicial positions beginning April 1, 2019. Twelve of these new appointments were recently made to Ontario's Unified Family Court.

[Translation]

We are also maintaining and strengthening access to justice in both official languages.

Budget 2019 would give the Department of Justice \$21.6 million over five years, starting in 2020-21, to support the legislative changes in Bill C-78 that seek to increase access to family justice in either official language.

[English]

This funding builds on our efforts in budget 2018, which provided an additional \$10 million over five years and \$2 million per year ongoing for Justice Canada's access to justice in both official languages support fund.

[Translation]

Another top priority for our government is ensuring that victims receive the support they need.

In 2019-20, the victims fund at the Department of Justice will provide \$28.72 million in grants and contributions to support research and innovative pilot projects, as well as front-line services for victims and survivors of crime across Canada.

● (1815)

[English]

The Department of Justice is also committed to helping immigrants and refugees. Budget 2017 included funding for immigration and refugee legal aid on an ongoing basis: \$62.9 million was identified over a five-year period, with an additional \$11.5 million per year thereafter. This funding helps prevent delays

in immigration and refugee processes and, most importantly, helps ensure access to justice for economically disadvantaged immigrants and refugees.

Budget 2019 builds on previous investments and commits an additional \$52 million over three years, primarily for immigration and refugee legal aid, but also to support the delivery of legal services.

[Translation]

I want to thank the committee for giving me an opportunity to speak to them today. The work of the Department of Justice is complex, and my brief comments offer merely a glimpse of the excellent work done by department employees.

[English]

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I think it is important that several things were outlined in the minister's speech. I would like to start with the question of victims.

From the work I have been doing as parliamentary secretary and the work that the committee has been doing on bills such as Bill C-84, where there was an important amendment to implement an offender registry for bestiality crimes, and Bill C-75, in relation to victims of intimate partner violence, I know that addressing the needs of victims is at the core of what we are doing as a government.

The minister mentioned in his remarks that under budget 2019 there is funding for the Department of Justice's victims fund, which is targeted at giving victims and survivors of crime the respect and dignity they deserve.

I wonder if the minister could elaborate on the types of projects these funds will support in budget 2019 to help us achieve our commitments toward addressing victims.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I thank my hon. parliamentary secretary for his hard work.

The victims fund provides grants and contributions to support projects and activities that encourage the development of new approaches, promote access to justice, improve the capacity of service providers, foster the establishment of referral networks and/or increase awareness of services available to victims of crime and their families. The initiative provides funding to a limited number of victim-serving non-governmental organizations whose programs and activities are aligned with the victims fund and Government of Canada priorities.

I will give one example. In April, I was proud to announce \$300,000 in support of the establishment of a new child advocacy centre in the Plateau in Montreal, Centre d'expertise Marie-Vincent. I visited that centre. It gives 360° service to kids at a very vulnerable time in their lives, including and incorporating all the services they would need, whether they be social, medical or support from police authorities.

Business of Supply

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Chair, I would now like to address the issue of access to justice. The minister raised this very clearly in the remarks that commenced this debate. He talked about access to justice as a general proposition. He talked about immigrant and refugee legal aid. We know what has been going on, particularly in my home province, Ontario, under the new Conservative government led by Premier Ford. There are specific cuts that are being made. There have been attacks on access to justice writ large, but specifically for the immigrant and refugee community.

I would like to ask the minister about something he mentioned, the justice partnership innovation program. That is a program that is encouraging involvement in identification of emerging trends, issues or gaps and possible responses with respect to the justice system. Can he provide an example of what we are funding with this program? I am thinking specifically about the cuts to Pro Bono Ontario that were manifested by Premier Ford.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I take my cues on access to justice from my mentor, the late Rod Macdonald.

An example would be that in 2018 this program provided \$250,000 to Pro Bono Ontario to help it adjust to a changing context and develop a sustainable model, ensuring that it continues to be able to serve Ontario's most vulnerable people.

Another example would be through budget 2018, where \$25 million was committed for projects focused on public legal education, including addressing sexual harassment in the workplace.

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Chair, I want to turn to the issue of youth. We know that youth is a priority for our government and for the Prime Minister, who maintains responsibility as the minister responsible for youth. That has a component of hearing the voices of youth, but also responding to youth's needs.

My question for the minister is the following. There is a funding program called the youth justice fund. That is a fund that provides grants and contributions to projects that encourage a more effective youth justice system. It responds to youth justice issues and also enables greater citizen and community participation in the youth justice system. Can the minister elaborate on what kinds of projects this fund supports in terms of promoting youth resilience?

• (1820)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, earlier this year I was in Edmonton, where I had the opportunity to learn first-hand about the youth resiliency project by the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award's Alberta, Northwest Territories and Nunavut division. Drawing from the framework of the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, the youth resiliency project focuses on personal empowerment through community service, physical recreation, skill development and outdoor exploration. The passion and commitment of those involved in this project will make an incredible difference in the lives of the young people they support.

I am proud that the youth justice fund is providing \$849,968 over four years for this project.

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Chair, the minister commented on the number of judges who have been appointed under our mandate as a government and on the judicial diversity that is reflected in those appointments. I wonder if he could elaborate, in the brief time that

remains, as to why promoting a diverse bench is a good unto itself that is being pursued so vigorously by our government.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, it is critically important, in order to have a just and fair system, and in order for the system to be seen to be just and fair, that we have a bench that reflects the diversity of our great country. To that end, we have improved greatly on the diversity of the bench. It will simply do a better job understanding and hearing the people whom it absolutely has to serve in this very important area.

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Chair, with respect to the LGBTQ2 issue, the minister raised important aspects of Bill C-16. I wonder if he could comment on Bill C-75, which I also understand would take an anomaly in the Criminal Code, which is that consensual sexual relations of same-sex couples who are adults are not criminalized, but currently consensual sexual relations between youth ages 16 and 17 are criminalized. How would Bill C-75 address that point?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I am afraid I do not have that answer in front of me. I get the hardest questions from my colleagues. I will undertake to get back to the member.

The Chair: That ends the second part of the opening round. We will now go to the third installation, with the hon. member for Essex.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Chair, I will use my time entirely for questions.

Does the Liberal government still intend to issue a deferred prosecution agreement for SNC-Lavalin?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I welcome the hon. member to the justice portfolio, having worked with her a great deal in trade in a previous life and respected her work there.

As I answered my previous colleague, because there is ongoing appellate litigation in the matter, I simply will not comment.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, does the minister think that he was appointed as the new Minister of Justice and Attorney General because he is a Quebec MP and, arguably, more receptive to a DPA with SNC-Lavalin?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I have to admit that I resent that question. I believe that my record in this House and my record as a legal academic over many years would put me in a position to understand, apply and interpret laws in service to the Canadian public.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, how many times has the minister met with SNC-Lavalin since becoming the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, since becoming Minister of Justice, never.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, how many times did the minister meet with SNC-Lavalin before becoming the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I stated before the justice committee, the lobbying record shows that I met once with SNC-Lavalin in 2017. That year, I was the most lobbied member of Parliament, according to The Hill Times.

Business of Supply

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, how many times has the minister spoken to people outside of the justice department about a DPA for SNC-Lavalin?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I am a member of Parliament and the Minister of Justice, I have conversations with people all the time. People tend to give me their opinion, whether I ask for it or not.

• (1825)

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, has the minister spoken to anyone in the Prime Minister's Office or the Privy Council Office about a DPA with SNC-Lavalin since he became Minister of Justice and Attorney General?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I said in front of the justice committee, I had one informal breakfast meeting, where it was one subject among many. It was at the very first cabinet retreat, with two members of the PMO. I also had a usual briefing, in the normal course of events, with Department of Justice staff, where, again, it was one subject among many.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, could the minister tell us which members of the PMO he met with?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I believe I am on the record on this. If not, I met with Elder Marques and Mathieu Bouchard.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, will the Liberal government call for an independent public inquiry into the SNC-Lavalin allegations that the PMO interfered politically in the case, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I will reiterate what the director of public prosecutions has said. She felt no interference from any members of the government or political parties in the course of this affair. I point to the testimony provided by my predecessor to the committee. She said that she felt nobody broke the law.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, that did not answer my question.

Will the Liberal government call for an independent public inquiry into the SNC-Lavalin allegations that the PMO politically interfered, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I will repeat what I said before. My predecessor said, in front of the committee, that she felt nobody broke the law. The director of public prosecutions is on the record as saying that she did not feel any political interference or pressure.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, that still does not answer my question. I will try once more.

Will the Liberal government, now, call for an independent public inquiry into the SNC-Lavalin allegations, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I will remind the member that an independent officer of Parliament, the Ethics Commissioner, is undertaking an independent inquiry into the matter.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, it must be a no, but why will the Liberals not launch a public investigation into the SNC-Lavalin affair?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I have stated a number of times in the House, and as others in the government have stated, we respect the institutions of Parliament and parliamentary officers, including the Ethics Commissioner, who is undertaking an inquiry into this particular matter.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, does the minister think Canadians deserve a public inquiry, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I have said, the Ethics Commissioner, who is an independent officer of Parliament, is undertaking to produce a public report.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, Canadians deserve an answer. Does the minister think Canadians deserve the truth and deserve an independent public inquiry, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, all members on all sides of the House want Canadians to have the truth, and all members on all sides of the House are endeavouring to ensure Canadians have the truth. The Ethics Commissioner will play a role in this matter. The justice committee has played a role in this matter, and other participants have made statements in this matter.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, the minister seems to be having difficulty understanding the idea of a yes or no answer, so I will ask my question again.

Does the minister think that Canadians deserve a public inquiry, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I have pointed out, a public inquiry is being undertaken by the Ethics Commissioner.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, no public inquiry is under way. The Ethics Commissioner's work is limited and it is not an independent public inquiry.

I will ask my question once again. Will the Liberal government call for an independent public inquiry into the SNC-Lavalin allegations that the PMO interfered politically, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I have repeated a number of times, Canadians obviously deserve the truth. My predecessor has stated in her testimony before the justice committee that she did not feel that anyone broke the law. The director of public prosecutions has said that she felt no political interference.

• (1830)

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, obviously we are not going to get an answer from the minister tonight on whether the government intends to get to the truth for Canadians. Therefore, I will switch gears. We will talk a bit about the testimony of the former attorney general. In her testimony, she said:

I experienced a consistent and sustained effort by many people within the government to seek to politically interfere in the exercise of prosecutorial discretion in my role as the Attorney General of Canada in an inappropriate effort to secure a deferred prosecution agreement with SNC-Lavalin.

Business of Supply

Does the minister ever think it is appropriate for anyone in the PMO, the PCO or any political actors to pressure the Attorney General about a particular case with respect to his or her prosecutorial discretion?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I have said on a number of occasions publicly, I have felt no pressure from anyone in cabinet or in the Prime Minister's Office to exercise my powers of directing a DPA in this particular case. If such pressure were to happen, I would immediately react.

I cannot speak for what my predecessor felt. I know that there are competing narratives out there.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, when the member for Vancouver Granville testified at the committee, she described “a barrage of people hounding” her and her staff.

What are the minister's thoughts on that statement?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, that was certainly her statement. As I said, there are competing accounts. I was not privy to any of those discussions or conversations, and I do note that there were competing narratives.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, I believe the member for Vancouver Granville. Canadians believe the member for Vancouver Granville. Does he?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, again, I cannot comment, because I was not party to those conversations.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, does the minister think that the member for Vancouver Granville was telling the truth?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, once again, there are perfectly compatible competing interpretations of events in which everyone is telling the truth.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, I will try again. It is unfortunate that I have to repeat the questions and I am unable to get answers.

Do you think that the member for Vancouver Granville is telling the truth, yes or no?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, I rise on a point of order.

As you know, the same rules apply as when we are not in committee of the whole. The members should know better than to refer specifically to the member as “you”. All questions should be put through the Chair.

The Chair: I thank the hon. member for Winnipeg North for bringing this to the attention of the committee of the whole this evening. He is right, of course. The normal rules of debate apply. I ask hon. members to direct their comments and speech toward the Chair and to use the third person form in the usual way they do in the House.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, once again, I was not privy to the conversations in question, so I have no real way to evaluate other than to say that there are a number of competing narratives that are compatible with everyone having told the truth.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, will the minister launch an independent investigation into how Vice-Admiral Norman's case has been handled?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I have said a number of times in this House, the RCMP did its job in gathering evidence and initially laying charges. The prosecution service took on the carriage of the case and eventually decided to stay the charges. I am confident that our justice system, our investigative system and our prosecution system have functioned well.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, Vice-Admiral Norman and his lawyer are not confident in that at all, so I will ask again, since I did not receive an answer that time. Will the minister launch an independent investigation into how Vice-Admiral Norman's case was handled, yes or no?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, the various institutions in question here operate independently of the Department of Justice. The RCMP, in its investigative role, and the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, under the direction of the director of public prosecutions, have performed their functions independently of us, and I am satisfied that the justice system in Canada functioned well to get to an appropriate result.

● (1835)

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, it is quite curious to me that the minister does not seem to be able to utter the word “no”, although that is certainly what Canadians are hearing tonight from him.

Why did the Prime Minister comment publicly that the Norman case was likely to proceed to trial before it actually happened?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I was not minister of justice at the time, so I do not know the exact timing of what happened, and I have no comment on it.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, does the minister think that the Prime Minister should comment publicly on a case that is likely to proceed to trial before that actually happens?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I can say again that the director of public prosecutions has stated on at least two occasions that there was no political interference in the prosecution or the carriage of the case and the decision to stay the case, and the RCMP is fiercely independent in its investigative role.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, does the minister think that the Prime Minister's comments were appropriate?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, once again, there has been, according to the actors in the system who manage the system, the director of public prosecutions and the RCMP, no political interference in this case, in their view.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, does the minister believe that the Prime Minister commenting on a case that is likely to proceed to trial before it actually happens is respecting the independence of the justice system?

Business of Supply

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, once again, these institutions in Canada are robust. We are very proud of the RCMP and the prosecution service, which is newer but was a welcome contribution from the Conservative government at the time. We think it was a good thing, and it is working well.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Mr. Chair, does the minister understand that Canada's international reputation was tarnished when the OECD referred the SNC-Lavalin case to its working group on bribery?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, once again, I take note of the hon. member's question. I am aware that the OECD said it would follow it, but it is a fairly routine procedure for the OECD to look at a number of different cases in a number of different countries.

The Chair: That will conclude the third part of the first and opening round. We are going to go now to the next round of speeches.

Before we do that, I want to commend all hon. members for the way they are observing the rules of this committee of the whole. The flow has been excellent. If we could stay on that track, we are going to have a good meeting this evening.

The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault (Edmonton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will take your comments to heart and continue in the same vein the committee of the whole has proceeded to this point.

I will be providing 10 minutes of remarks, followed by some questions.

[Translation]

I am very proud today to take the floor to share with Canadians some of our government's accomplishments in recognizing, promoting and protecting the equality rights of LGBTQ2 communities.

[English]

From the beginning of our government's mandate, we have demonstrated our commitment to diversity and inclusion in the hope that all Canadians can participate fully in Canadian society and be recognized as deserving of the same respect, deference and consideration. This commitment equally extends to members of the LGBTQ2 community.

Canadians expect their government to respect their human rights and to promote these rights. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs once stated in this very chamber, LGBTQ2 rights are human rights, and human rights have no borders. It is a commitment our government takes very seriously abroad and here at home.

In budget 2017, the Government of Canada set aside \$3.6 million over three years for the creation of the LGBTQ2 Secretariat within the Privy Council Office. The secretariat works with LGBTQ2 stakeholders across the country. This important work keeps our government informed about the challenging situations affecting LGBTQ2 Canadians and the potential solutions.

The secretariat also supports the integration of LGBTQ2 considerations in the day-to-day work of the federal government across all ministries. These efforts really help the government ensure that federal policies, programs and laws related to gender expression,

gender identity and sexual orientation are all within the same spirit and the same view to equality, inclusion and diversity.

In November 2016, I was honoured to be appointed the Prime Minister's special adviser on LGBTQ2 issues. My role is to advise the Prime Minister on how to develop and coordinate the Government of Canada's LGBTQ2 policies and laws. This includes informing cabinet, parliamentarians and committees and engaging with LGBTQ2 organizations from across the country and around the world to promote equality, and listening to LGBTQ2 people and communities and identifying solutions to improve their lives.

In addition to the excellent work of the LGBTQ2 Secretariat, all ministries of our government have a responsibility to improve the lives of LGBTQ2 Canadians, and that includes the Department of Justice.

• (1840)

[Translation]

Early in our government's mandate, we also introduced and passed Bill C-16, an act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code. This bill conferred greater protection on members of LGBTQ2 communities who experience discrimination and even violence because of their gender identity or expression. Bill C-16 added gender identity and expression to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in the Canadian Human Rights Act. This law promotes the principle that all individuals should have an equal opportunity to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have, without being hindered by discriminatory practices.

[English]

Bill C-16 has also expanded hate crime offences in the Criminal Code to protect groups that are targeted because of their gender identity or gender expression.

[Translation]

Unfortunately, in Canada, transgender people are at high risk of verbal or physical violence and sexual harassment. Given this high degree of violence or threatened violence, it is only fair that our criminal law specifically denounce violence committed against a person as a result of the person's gender identity or expression.

[English]

The Prime Minister's apology to LGBTQ2 communities was another significant milestone in recognizing LGBTQ2 communities and protecting them as equal members of Canadian society. On November 28, 2017, the Prime Minister delivered a formal apology in this very House to individuals harmed by federal legislation, policies and practices that led to the oppression of and discrimination against two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Canada.

Business of Supply

The Prime Minister apologized specifically for the shameful LGBT purge, the historical unjust treatment of LGBTQ2 federal public servants, including those in the Canadian Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. This discriminatory treatment resulted in the loss of livelihoods, dignity and even lives.

There was a time in this country when people could be charged, prosecuted and criminally convicted simply because of their sexual orientation. To address this grave injustice, this government introduced Bill C-66. Now records of convictions involving consensual sexual activity between same-sex partners of legal age can be destroyed.

We are hopeful that this change will provide some relief to the many LGBTQ2 Canadians for whom the pain, trauma and fear have been all too real for all too long a time. Such discrimination has no place in Canada today. With Bill C-66, we took responsibility for recognizing and rectifying this historic injustice.

[Translation]

Since the government is taking measures to rectify historic discrimination based on unfair laws and policies, it is taking steps to remove from the Criminal Code an anachronistic offence that was used to target consensual sexual activities between gay men.

[English]

Under section 159 of the Criminal Code, unmarried persons can consent to engage in anal intercourse at age 18. The age of consent for any other form of non-exploitative sexual activity is 16 years old. Section 159 makes an exception for consensual anal intercourse between married spouses if they are of the opposite sex, but not if they are of the same sex. This is discriminatory policy, and several appellate courts have found that this provision violates the equality rights guaranteed by section 15 of the charter. Repealing section 159, as Bill C-75 proposes to do, will prevent the laying of charges against people who engage in non-exploitative, consensual anal intercourse.

The Attorney General of Canada recently issued a directive on the prosecution of HIV non-disclosure cases for federal prosecutors, which applies in our territories.

Presently, the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights is undertaking a study that deals with the issue of HIV criminalization. The committee has heard from numerous witnesses about the negative impacts, not just on people's lives but on the public health system, of criminalizing HIV non-disclosure. I look forward to the continued work of the justice committee and to its report, and I look forward to the government's responding in a robust way to this very serious issue.

Returning to the directive, I note it is based on current scientific evidence regarding the sexual transmission of HIV and applicable criminal laws, as clarified by the Supreme Court of Canada in the Mabor case. The directive recognizes that the non-disclosure of HIV is, first and foremost, a public health issue. It is also important to note that public health authorities have many tools at their disposal to ensure that people do not engage in reckless behaviour. Those tools would not require that such a provision be in the Criminal Code.

● (1845)

[Translation]

The Attorney General of Canada also issued a directive on the prosecution of HIV non-disclosure cases for federal prosecutors, which applies in our territories. It is important that we work with the provinces. Right now, Ontario and British Columbia have policies and directives, but there are several territories in Canada that do not have such a directive. The directive is based on current scientific evidence regarding sexual transmission of HIV and the applicable criminal law.

[English]

Today I have touched on only a few of the many actions our government has taken to advance the full recognition, protection and participation of our LGBTQ2 communities. Our government will continue to demonstrate its commitment to promoting an inclusive society that works for all Canadians.

Before I get to questions, it is important to note that when we open up committee to civil society organizations and hear witnesses from coast to coast to coast, we let people who are not within 15 minutes or even two hours of Ottawa know that this government is their government. We let them know that the House and our parliamentary committees are designed to understand the issues that matter to them. It is important that we continue to open our committees to a diversity of voices, such as indigenous voices, the voices of depressed and marginalized people, and the voices of the LGBTQ2 community.

The health committee is right now wrapping up a study that was unanimously accepted by all members, about the health indicators of LGBTQ2 people. Our health indicators for this group are only slightly above those for indigenous people.

We have a lot of work to do in this chamber. We have a lot of work to do in advancing legislation and a lot of work to do to make lives better for all Canadians.

Now I have a few questions for the minister.

Could the minister share with us why it is important for us to continue our work on the prosecutorial policy directive as it pertains to the prosecution of HIV disclosure?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I thank the member for giving me the answer to the previous question, as I had missed section 159.

[Translation]

Our government is committed to reducing the stigma and discrimination experienced by people living with HIV or AIDS. That is why, on World AIDS Day, we were pleased to release our report on the criminal justice system's response to non-disclosure of HIV.

This directive will guarantee that prosecutions for HIV non-disclosure will be based on the most recent scientific evidence in this area and on the realistic possibility of transmission. Canada's efforts to detect and treat HIV have made it possible for most people living with HIV in Canada to know their status and receive appropriate treatment.

Business of Supply

Appropriate medical treatment considerably reduces the risk of transmission, and the directive reflects this reality. Criminalization can lead to an increase in infection rates because it deters Canadians from getting tested and treated.

[English]

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, I would like to say in English what I said in French, which is that the directive the minister is talking about is important, and we have heard from witnesses that it is important because it is a step in the right direction. It says that the government needs to follow the science, that prosecutors need to follow the science, and that when somebody is undetectable, they are untransmittable and should not be charged or prosecuted for non-disclosure of HIV status.

Equally important is the fact that because it is federal jurisdiction, the directive applies to the territories. British Columbia and Ontario have since issued a similar directive to their Crowns. However, I think it is important that we work at the federal, provincial and territorial level to include and encourage other jurisdictions to issue similar policies and directives.

Also, it would be important for us to look into the justice department. We have section 159, and we have the vagrancy and bawdy house provisions in Bill C-75, and I am looking forward to seeing it come back from the Senate. Could the minister share with the House and the committee of the whole other accomplishments that the department has achieved to make the lives of LGBTQ2 Canadians better?

• (1850)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, we are proud of Canada's diversity and inclusion. Our government believes that all Canadians should be safe to be themselves. In that regard, the major accomplishment was passing legislation that adds gender identity and expression as prohibited grounds for discrimination under the Canadian Human Rights Act, as well as adding gender identity and expression to the list of distinguishing characteristics of an identifiable group, so that they are protected by the hate speech provisions of the Criminal Code.

My colleague has mentioned section 159, the bawdy house and vagrancy provisions, in Bill C-75, which are also very important. We are proud to recognize these historic challenges that have been faced by the LGBTQ2 community, and we are committed to making their lives better. Indeed, equality is what we are committed to, so that people can live their lives and flourish as they wish to.

Mr. Randy Boissonnault: Mr. Chair, sometimes the law and the Criminal Code, as vast as it is, is a blunt instrument. Sometimes it shields people, and sometimes it means that they run into the law.

I wonder if the minister could share how he sees the law as a tool to protect vulnerable and minority populations in Canada.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, the law establishes baselines in things like the charter and the Canadian Human Rights Act. However, it is also the manner in which we interpret the law and the structures we put in place, not just to deal with transgressions but to deal with the victims and groups within society that are targeted. It is not simply about the written law but about the attitude we take to those laws.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am going to devote most of my time to questions to the minister and hope for a few answers in the process.

Minister, it is good to see you here tonight.

In your opening remarks in response to questions from my colleague, the MP for Milton, you mentioned that, as minister, you have asked the Department of Justice to do an overview to ensure you met obligations with respect to disclosure in the Vice-Admiral Mark Norman matter. Is that correct? Did I hear you properly?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, the actual detail is that I was briefed on the Norman matter.

I would remind my colleague that there was document disclosure between the prosecution and the defence in this matter. However, my department was only involved with respect to third party record applications. We set up a process in order to meet those obligations to the court.

I was satisfied after that briefing from my department that we had begun and were maintaining a rigorous procedure to try to get through these complex decisions.

The Chair: Before we go to the next question, I would remind all members that while committee of the whole is a little less formal, we still ask members to direct their questions through the Chair and use the third person in the usual fashion. However, there is some informality here and we will allow some latitude.

The hon. member for Durham.

• (1855)

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, I understand from the minister's comments that he feels that his department met its obligations with respect to the report. Could the minister table the report the department provided with respect to disclosure obligations?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, it was part of an oral briefing.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, did the minister say "oral briefing"? I could ask him what his code name is, but I will not do that.

For Canadians and members in the committee of the whole to get an understanding, as our chief legal officer, the Minister of Justice is responsible for all lawyers in the federal government. I would ask the minister to confirm that as the chief legal officer, all the lawyers in the federal government are under his mandate.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, that is true, as Attorney General of Canada.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, I would like the minister, who as attorney general is responsible for all lawyers, to tell me what Privy Council Office lawyer Paul Shuttle meant in communications with the prosecution in the Norman matter when he used the term "engineer the issues at stake". Could the minister, as chief legal officer, explain what the engineering of issues in the Mark Norman matter referred to?

Business of Supply

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I believe that lawyer is part of the legal team for the Privy Council Office, which serves the Prime Minister.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, I would like the chief legal officer of our country to now clarify that there are lawyers who, he is now appearing to suggest, do not work for him. Could he clarify? Are all lawyers, including Privy Council advisers to the Prime Minister and lawyers in that capacity, under his purview as minister?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, my understanding is that all lawyers in the justice department are, but not all lawyers in the government.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, as chief legal officer for the country, does the minister think it is appropriate that lawyers in the Privy Council Office were communicating with the director of public prosecutions with respect to trial strategy?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I am not prepared to accept the premise of that question. I have no comment on it.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, I quote: "So much for the independence of the PPSC." That is not my quote about the Public Prosecution Service of Canada. That is a quote from Justice Perkins-McVey, the judge in the Norman trial.

Does that comment from the judge who was presiding over the trial before the charges were stayed concern the minister? Does he feel an oral report to him is sufficient to look into that?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I described in a previous line of questioning, the Department of Justice set up a procedure with the court in order to fulfill its obligations with respect to third party records. That is all the Department of Justice was doing in this case. We identified over 140,000 potentially relevant documents in a variety of different places. That number was boiled down to 8,000 and then ultimately a judge, working through a civil servant and the PCO, was going to determine both the relevance of the documents and whether they would be subject to privilege of any sort, be it solicitor-client, cabinet confidence or other.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, the judge the minister is referring to, Justice Perkins-McVey, is the one I quoted. She had concerns about the independence of the public prosecutor after she had seen notes that were not fully disclosed to the defence and were claimed under litigation privilege because they dealt with trial strategy.

Does the minister, as our chief legal officer, feel it is appropriate for the Prime Minister's legal advisers to be communicating with Crown officials with respect to trial strategy?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, again, I do not accept the premise of the question. I point the hon. member to the statement by the director of public prosecutions herself. On at least two occasions she said there was no political interference in the case, and the prosecutor in the case also said that.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, on the February 11 pretrial date, defence counsel Mainville was raising concerns about the non-disclosure of notes that appear related to trial strategy. This is where the "engineer the issues at stake" led to the exchange.

Would the minister, if he is rejecting the premise of my question when I am quoting a judge, undertake to examine the concerns the

judge had with respect to independence in his role as chief legal officer?

• (1900)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I am obviously not going to comment on trial strategies of whatever party is involved in a trial. It would be absurd for me to do that.

What I will say is that the director of the prosecution service has stated on at least two occasions that there was no political interference, including for the staying of the decision. The prosecutor herself stated that there was no political interference.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, at the outset, the minister said that all lawyers in the government were under his purview. When asked about the first one I mentioned, he clarified that not all of them were.

Could the minister say whether the lawyers under his purview, whether any Department of Justice lawyers, spoke with Paul Shuttle, the PCO legal adviser about the Norman case?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, within the process, documents were turned over to PCO in order to determine whether they were covered by privilege, whether it be solicitor-client or cabinet privilege. This was a normal part of this process. I would point out that the clerk of the Privy Council delegated the ultimate authority to make the decision on whether documents had to be produced or redacted to the judge, which is highly exceptional and, I think, evidence of our good faith in this matter.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, would the minister undertake to examine whether there were communications with any Department of Justice officials and Privy Council advisers to the Prime Minister on trial strategy in the Norman matter?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, once again, I would point out that the director of public prosecutions has said that there has been no political interference in this trial. I am confident in the institutions, like the RCMP and the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, and, ultimately, very confident in our trial process.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, does the minister now consider litigation or the court case involving Vice-Admiral Norman to be complete?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, the prosecution has been stayed by the director of public prosecutions. I will say no more than that. The hon. member is an attorney and he knows what that means.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, I am indeed a lawyer and I know what that means. Since litigation has been completed, will our chief legal officer, today, agree to waive litigation privilege protections of the notes referred to at the February 11 matter involving PCO lawyer Paul Shuttle?

Business of Supply

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, there is currently another case proceeding through the courts based on the same set of facts, and I will do nothing to interfere with that case.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, if the other litigation concludes, will the minister then agree to waive litigation privilege over those notes?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, the hon. member knows that I will not answer that kind of hypothetical question.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, moving from the sublime to the ridiculous, I would like to remind the minister that he was appointed on January 14, and I congratulate the minister, belatedly. On January 17, former ambassador John McCallum appeared at cabinet. Did the minister speak with John McCallum about the extradition case of Meng Wanzhou?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, that kind of conversation would be covered by cabinet confidence.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, I will rephrase it. I do not want to know the substance of the conversation. Will the minister acknowledge, yes or no, that a conversation on the Meng Wanzhou extradition took place with Ambassador McCallum?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, again, I am not going to comment on that.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, I think people viewing would take that as a yes, as I do.

Mr. McCallum, the former ambassador, I would note, is not a lawyer. However, four or five days after meeting with cabinet, he did a press conference, saying Meng Wanzhou had strong legal arguments to fight against her extradition. Did the minister speak about those legal arguments with the ambassador?

• (1905)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, once again, the honest answer is that I actually have no recollection whether I spoke to him or not.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, clearly the Prime Minister asked for the resignation of Ambassador McCallum after he spoke publicly a few days after the cabinet meeting about the substance of the Meng Wanzhou extradition case, which was highly inappropriate.

On February 7, the minister gave an interview to the Toronto Star, where he said that ultimately the extradition was in his hands. He said, "foreign affairs is a political matter".

Is he the final arbiter for the Meng Wanzhou extradition?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I said a number of times publicly, there is an extradition process that has been established in Canada in which the process will go through the court system. Ultimately, at the end of all legal proceedings, if there is an extradition order, it is up to the Minister of Justice, in my role as Minister of Justice, to order or not that extradition according to established criteria.

What I was referring to in the Toronto Star interview, and I thank the hon. member for allowing me the time to clarify this, was that as Minister of Justice, and not as Attorney General in this particular role, it is ultimately a recognition that external affairs is of a different order of things. However, there are legal criteria, which I will follow should we get to that point.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, as the final arbiter, as the minister mentioned, after the process has run its course, that he would make a final determination in his role as Minister of Justice.

A few days ago, the minister had dinner at the Orchid Ball in Montreal with the consulate general of China. Did the Meng Wanzhou case come up in his dinner with the ambassador?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, no, it did not. We talked to each other and said that we would not talk about the case.

Hon. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Chair, did the minister make inquiries with respect to the legal rights of Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig and the lack of access to justice that our own citizens have in that country?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, again, it was a social evening. It was not a formal meeting. I was not seated next to that person.

The Chair: That will conclude this round. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Mississauga—Erin Mills.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be providing 10 minutes of remarks followed by some questions.

I want to begin my remarks today by thanking all members on the Standing Committee of Justice and Human Rights from all sides of the House. Together, over these past few years, we have worked on issues related to access to justice, medical assistance in dying, mental health supports for jurors, strengthening impaired driving laws, addressing the issue of human trafficking in Canada and so much more. Ultimately, we have worked hard to ensure that the communities we represent safer.

There have been many pieces of legislation that have passed through our committee, and today I would like to focus on Bill C-75, an act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other acts and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

One of the challenges I have heard about from my community and from Canadians across Canada is the issue of delays in accessing the justice system. I have also heard from constituents about the accessibility of the justice system, issues surrounding victims rights and the challenges faced by victims of intimate partner violence. The purpose of Bill C-75 is to address these very issues of our communities from coast to coast to coast.

This legislation is a key milestone in the government's ongoing efforts to transform the criminal justice system, keeping the government's overall goals at the forefront, which are to keep communities safe, protect victims and to hold offenders to account.

Canada's justice system faces numerous major and multi-faceted challenges. While the volume and severity of crimes have decreased over the years, criminal court cases are becoming more complex and trials are taking longer to complete. Delays in the criminal justice system impact the accused and his or her charter right to be tried within a reasonable time. They also impact victims and all those affected by crime in our communities.

The criminal justice system is a shared responsibility between federal, provincial and territorial governments.

Business of Supply

The federal government is responsible for the enactment of criminal law and procedure, criminal prosecutions of all federal offences, certain offences in the Criminal Code and prosecution of all offences in the territories, as well as the appointment of judges for superior courts.

Provincial and territorial governments on the other hand are responsible for the administration of justice, including the prosecution of criminal offences in the provinces, the administration of police, Crown and court personnel and the appointment of provincial court judges.

At their meetings held in April and September 2017, federal-provincial and territorial ministers responsible for justice met to discuss actions taken and ways to strategically address delays in the criminal justice system. Discussions included identifying innovative and best practices as well as legislative reforms to resolve criminal cases in a just and timely manner. All agreed on the need for targeted and bold criminal law reform in the following key priority areas: bail, administration of justice offences, preliminary inquiries, reclassification of offences and judicial case management.

Ministers agreed on the importance of a collaborative approach with all players in the criminal justice system, and Bill C-75 is a true reflection of that collaborative approach with key criminal justice system partners.

Some reforms included in Bill C-75 would address issues that were identified by the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in its June 2017 report, entitled, "Delaying Justice is Denying Justice". It included 50 recommendations, with a number of them relating to criminal law reform. The bill would address a number of these recommendations, namely on preliminary inquiries, case management, bail, administration of justice offences and the use of technology, including to facilitate remote appearances.

In addition, the reforms respond to the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in *Jordan* in 2016, which established strict timelines beyond which delays would be presumptively unreasonable and result in cases being stayed. In this decision, the Supreme Court also stressed the need for efforts by all those involved in the criminal justice system to reduce delays and increase efficiencies. Bill C-75 would address that.

One of the issues highlighted through our committee work is the overrepresentation of indigenous people in jail. The 2016-17 statistics indicate that 28% to 30% of custody admissions are indigenous. The numbers are even higher for youth at 50%, and women at 42%. Bill C-75 would help reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples and vulnerable populations in the criminal justice system.

• (1910)

Indigenous people and vulnerable populations tend to be disproportionately impacted by onerous and unnecessary bail conditions. They are also more likely to be charged with breaching minor conditions, and more likely to be caught in the revolving door of the criminal justice system.

The bill would help address these problems by enacting a principle of restraint in the bail regime to ensure that when there are no concerns about the accused coming to court or posing a risk to

public safety, police officers and justices would release detained accused at the earliest reasonable opportunity; by requiring that conditions imposed by police be reasonable in the circumstances and necessary to ensure the accused's attendance in court or the safety and security of the victims or witnesses; and by providing that circumstances of the accused, in particular indigenous accused and accused persons from vulnerable populations, be considered at bail and in determining how to address a breach of conditions.

Bill C-75 also includes measures that would positively impact victims of crime. These include the bail reforms, which would also better protect victims of intimate partner violence by creating a reverse onus at bail, and would expand the list of conditions that can be imposed by police, including conditions to protect victims.

The preliminary inquiry reforms, which would restrict the availability of preliminary inquiries to offences with penalties of life imprisonment, would prevent some victims from having to testify twice.

The proposed administration of justice offence changes would only apply in cases in which there has been no harm caused to a victim, whether physical, emotional or through property damage.

The bill would also provide reassurance to victims of intimate partner violence by imposing a reverse onus at bail for accused persons charged with an intimate partner violence offence if they have a prior conviction for violence against an intimate partner; by requiring courts to consider whether an accused is charged with an intimate partner violence offence when determining whether to release or detain the accused; by clarifying that strangulation, choking and suffocation are elevated forms of assault; by defining "intimate partner" for all Criminal Code purposes and clarifying that it includes current or former spouse, common-law partner and dating partner; by clarifying that the current sentencing provisions, which treat abuse against a spouse or common-law partner as an aggravating factor, apply to both current and former spouses or common-law partners and dating partners; and by allowing for the possibility of seeking a higher maximum penalty in cases involving a repeat intimate partner violence offender.

Business of Supply

Lastly, the proposed reforms with respect to bail, administration of justice offences and the reclassification of offences support an approach that is expected to minimize the differential impact on marginalized populations in the criminal justice system, including indigenous peoples, through modernizing and streamlining processes, providing flexibility and creating appropriate tools for managing factors such as vulnerability, mental health and addiction.

It is important to note that these proposed Criminal Code amendments cannot address all social issues that impact those in contact with the criminal justice system. As such, operational changes in the courts or in the administration of justice at the provincial and territorial level may better address such issues. As well, training for criminal justice system actors, such as police, the Crown and judges, would support the bill's goal of making the criminal justice system more fair and accessible to all Canadians.

As mentioned earlier, opportunities to address delays also fall under provincial jurisdiction, as provinces have responsibility over the administration of justice. It is unfortunate that the Ontario provincial government has recently announced its decision to cut funding for the Ontario Provincial Police by \$45 million. These cuts will impact the administration of justice.

The people of Ontario, and indeed all Canadians, have the commitment of the federal government that we will continue to work closely with the provinces and territories to identify further measures to reduce delays and improve the criminal justice system.

That said, I do have some questions for the minister, if allowed.

• (1915)

Mr. John Brassard: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, could you confirm what time the committee of the whole will be ending tonight?

The Acting Chair (Mr. John Nater): I thank the hon. member. I believe the committee of the whole will sit for four hours and will conclude at approximately at 9:49 p.m. this evening.

The hon. member for Mississauga—Erin Mills for questions.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Mr. Chair, one of the cases that keeps reappearing within our justice committee when we are talking about delays and the speedy admission of justice is the Jordan decision in 2016.

In 2016, in the Jordan decision, the Supreme Court of Canada called upon all criminal justice actors to do their part in reducing court delays. To that end, what measures does the minister feel are the most important to increase efficiencies in the criminal justice system?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for her speech, her question and her work on the justice committee.

The answer is fourfold.

The first measure is law reform, and the hon. member has spoken at length about the changes brought forward in Bill C-75, which we feel will increase the efficiency of our justice system and reduce delays.

The second is funding for various programs. The indigenous court worker program is one example. By working with certain over-

represented groups, we will be able to address delays in the justice system.

The third is collaboration with provincial and territorial governments to address delays, and the last one has to do with judicial appointments. As I mentioned in my speech, we have made over 300 appointments of a very high quality since taking office, and that is helping to reduce delays in the system.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Mr. Chair, since this place studied Bill C-75, on December 14, 2018, the Supreme Court of Canada rendered its decision on the victim surcharge found in section 737 of the Criminal Code. The court held that the mandatory victim surcharge is contrary to section 12 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, because it could result in grossly disproportionate punishment for vulnerable or marginalized offenders.

The mandatory surcharge is a fixed amount that every offender must pay at the time of sentencing. It is 30% for any fine imposed or \$100 per summary conviction offence or \$200 per indictable offence.

I am aware that Bill C-75 proposed changes to this regime in order to provide some judicial discretion related to the imposition of the victim surcharge. Does the minister feel that these changes properly respond to the Supreme Court of Canada's guidance? Will the government be proposing any amendments to this bill to reflect this new Supreme Court of Canada decision?

• (1920)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for her important question. As I have stated, we are committed to ensuring that Canada's criminal justice system meets the highest standards of equity and fairness.

The Boudreault decision on December 14 found, as the member has pointed out, that the victim fine surcharge violated section 12 of the charter because it could result in a grossly disproportionate punishment, especially for vulnerable and marginalized offenders. Indeed, the provinces and territories that use this fund to fund victim services have not used it since December 2014, or their courts have not used it.

We realize this has an important role. We thought Bill C-75 went a long way to following with that, but after consulting with provinces and territories, the federal ombudsperson for victims of crime, and stakeholders, we have decided to propose amendments to Bill C-75, presently in front of the Senate, that will grant judges additional discretion to determine when the surcharge should be applied. This aligns it with the Boudreault decision, while continuing to ensure that offenders are properly held accountable to victims and to society as a whole.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Mr. Chair, we work in a collective and a collaborative way with provinces and territories. As our Constitution has divided our responsibilities, the administration of justice falls within the purview of the provinces.

Business of Supply

Can the minister please advise this House how important it is for us to work collaboratively in each of our roles within our respective governments, and how important it is to provide funding as well to officers of the court, such as police officers and court administrators, in order to have the effective, efficient criminal justice system that Canadians require and deserve?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, it is critically important that we co-operate. The administration of justice is, in a sense, a shared responsibility. For example, we name judges, while the provinces have the responsibility for administering the court system.

It is the same thing with legal aid across Canada, as another example. We share responsibility and financial responsibility with the provinces. The provinces furnish legal aid services, and we provide part of the funding.

Obviously cuts across Canada do concern me. We are studying the impact of cuts very carefully.

The Chair: Before we resume debate, for the benefit of other hon. members who may have a speaking slot coming up, I will remind them that they do not have to be in their own seats in order to present in committee of the whole. They can take the seat of their choice—on whichever side they wish, of course, but that is up to them.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Milton.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Chair, following up on the excellent questions of my learned colleague, the member for Durham, I wanted to get a bit further into this oral report that the minister received from his department that has allowed him to come to the conclusion that there is nothing to see here and everything went fine.

I would like to take the minister through some specific things that happened in the hearings that have transpired since November 23 of last year. Predominantly, this is about the fact that the documents were being sought so the defence could put together an abuse-of-process motion to have the charge dismissed because, the defence said, there was political interference and obstruction of the subpoena requests for documents.

With respect to the hearing, between December 12 and December 18, it was said that emails between a Crown prosecutor and legal counsel in the Privy Council Office, which is the government department that supports the Prime Minister, showed the Privy Council Office lawyer asking for updates on who had been identified as potential witnesses, what was discussed in judicial pretrial meetings and what the defence planned to argue in pretrial motions. Does this concern the minister with respect to administration of justice in his department?

• (1925)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I have stated, I am not going to make comments about the actual proceedings of the case in the past tense. It would be inappropriate for me to do that. There are always a lot of strategic moves that are made throughout the course of a trial.

What I can say is that the justice department's role in this matter was in fulfillment of third party document requests, for which my department specifically set up a process. That process was followed because of the complexity and the sheer number of the documents requested. The process was set up to evaluate the requests and to

then decide whether those documents were covered by some sort of privilege or confidence.

Again, it is a complex process, and we delegated the final decision-making authority to a judge.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: The issue, Mr. Chair, is not whether the judge was to make the decision. We all know that at the end of the day she did not, because of the amount of delay that the current government allowed for.

What we do know as well from these trial dates and these hearings is that there were even problems with how they gamed the system in terms of the kinds of words that would trigger disclosure of documents.

It was revealed in the trial that access-to-information requests in 2017 returned no results. In the entire Mark Norman case, when meetings were going on day after day and information and surveillance was going on, there were no results in all of the Department of National Defence, and guess why. It was because a witness came forward and asked for protection from his own government so that his name would not be disclosed after he told Canadians that code names were used in order to ensure that there would be no response in the documents.

Why does the minister not think that this is something that needs to be looked into further?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, once again I will not comment about the various back-and-forth details about the case. That was managed by the director of public prosecutions and the Public Prosecution Service of Canada, independently of the Government of Canada. Both the director of public prosecutions, on at least two occasions, as well as the prosecutor in question have stated that.

The Department of Justice had a role to play in the production of documents. As I said, 144,000 documents were identified as being potentially relevant. That number had to be assessed and analyzed, and it was boiled down to 8,000. Ultimately, those documents were in the process to go to a judge to be evaluated for privilege and that sort of thing. The Department of Justice has fulfilled its obligations in this case.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: To recap, Mr. Chair, we have now heard that the Crown prosecutor was talking to legal counsel in the Privy Council Office. We have heard that they were asking for updates on who has been identified as potential witnesses. We now know that ATIPs were being deliberately avoided.

Now we move on to another one. Also heard in testimony during that hearing in December was the fact that federal government lawyers, who would be these ministers' lawyers, inappropriately intervened in the defence's access to witnesses and in giving witnesses bad information.

Does the minister think that this is enough of a problem to warrant an investigation?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, the comment was taken completely out of context. I have no way of commenting on it, nor should I.

Business of Supply

The prosecution service and counsel on each side are going to undertake to defend their clients as best they can in the ordinary course of proceedings, requesting documents, defending against those requests, etc.

The role of the Department of Justice, as I have made clear, was in the production of third-party document requests. We set up a process in response to the defence counsel, in particular, in that case. We set up a process that was fair and took into account the quantity and complexity of the documentation as well as the fact that there would be solicitor-client cabinet confidence and litigation privilege attached to a number of those documents.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, the government's documents collection was atrocious. It was to the point that the minister should know that the chief of the defence staff, although he learned in December that code names were used to avoid the production of documents, did not check in on it until the third week of January. Nobody in that four-week period of time thought to go back and actually do a further search. I think that is something else that needs to be investigated.

As well, as we tuned into hearings between January 29 and February 1, even more information came out, most importantly the fact that one of the lawyers who would be working for this minister, a lawyer in bed with the Department of National Defence, was alleged to have given advice to a former assistant to the Minister of National Defence with respect to what she needed to disclose in her search. She said she had two phones, a government-issued Blackberry and a personal iPhone. However, she took the advice of the Department of National Defence and did not search her personal emails and did not know whether her Blackberry messages were included in the search.

There was not a sufficient search. It was advised by a lawyer from the Department of Justice. Does the minister think that is enough to warrant an inquiry?

• (1930)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, again, I am not going to comment on the veracity of any allegations that are made or the sources they came from. What I can say is that the process we envisaged and used in the justice department included email, personal devices and that sort of thing for those potentially relevant documents.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, what is interesting is that there is actually someone within the justice department who gets this, because justice department counsel Robert MacKinnon told the court in those hearings that it does not matter where the government-related business is being handled. Whether it is in personal emails or personal data, they are covered by the subpoena, and he would be following up to make sure that actually happened.

Does the minister agree with that comment made by his own lawyer, and should this be followed up on?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I will not comment on specific allegations or their veracity.

What I can say is that the process we did set up was meant to include potentially all kinds of documents, including those contained on devices.

I will also point out that the judge thanked us at the conclusion of the trial for our hard work in producing documents.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, I assure members that Vice-Admiral Norman, with his gigantic legal bill, which is now going to be paid by the taxpayers of Canada, does not thank the government for the shoddy work it conducted throughout this entire process, which caused so much pain and so much cost, either because it maliciously wanted to ensure that these documents did not come forward or because it was simply inept. Either of those two reasons means that there should be an inquiry in that department by this minister by his own hand.

I will ask the minister again. Will he be conducting a real inquiry, one that is written on paper, not an oral version, so that Canadians can get to the bottom of exactly what happened in this case?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I was referring to a briefing earlier on, and I want to correct the record, as it is being misconstrued in this regard.

As I have said a number of times, this was an extraordinarily complex set of third-party documents that was requested, a large number, many of which would be covered by different kinds of privilege. We set up a process that would work, and we did a great deal of work within six months. We did better than in many private litigation cases that can go on for years.

I am quite happy with the performance of the Department of Justice in this matter. It put together a process that was fair and a process that worked, and indeed, the judge complimented us at the end of the case.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, it is interesting that the minister indicated that he received a briefing. I used to receive those briefings too. There was always a report attached to them.

Especially given the fact that there were 8,000 documents released, I do not assume that department officials went through each document verbally, so I am wondering once again if the minister would provide the document upon which the verbal briefing was provided to him.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, if you give me 10 minutes, I am willing to read the note that describes the whole process for the documents.

• (1935)

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, that was not the question. My question specifically at the very beginning was whether the minister would order an independent inquiry through his powers under the Inquiries Act. His response was that he already received a report. That is not a report.

Would the minister like to exactly clarify for us, so we can get to the nuts and bolts of it, what kind of report has been issued? Was it verbal? Is it real? If it is real, can we have a copy of it so we can understand and the Canadian public can finally understand what happened in this case?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I have stated, I received a briefing in the course of events at which I was assured that we were taking all steps to meet our third party records application responsibilities. I am satisfied.

Business of Supply

I have offered to read a description of what the process was that was set up. I am satisfied, and the court complimented us at the end of the case, that we took an extraordinary number of documents with extraordinary complexity, and we managed to put them through a process in which a judge would have the final say as to whether they would be produced or not and whether they would be redacted or not.

I am very satisfied that we in the Department of Justice fulfilled our responsibilities.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Chair, I am very concerned that the minister and the government are not taking this matter seriously.

Let us fast forward to more hearings that happened on March 28 of this year. This time it was a battle over redactions to memos. I would like to know from the minister if we could receive copies of the October 19, 2018, 64-page memo from Paul Shuttle to the former clerk of the privy council, Michael Wernick; the October 24, 2018, 60-page memo from the former clerk to the Prime Minister; and the December 22, 2017, memo from Paul Shuttle to the former clerk of the privy council, Michael Wernick.

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I point out that with respect to these documents, the judge upheld the claim of solicitor-client privilege. They are privileged documents.

I dispute the premise the hon. member stated that we are not taking this seriously. I as minister take this matter very seriously. The department takes it seriously. The government takes it seriously.

We put together a very strong process, which again, exceptionally, put the final decision, including decisions on cabinet confidence, in the hands of a judge and not in the hands of the clerk of the privy council.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: I do not know what is worse, Mr. Chair. A minister stands in the House without a grasp on his file and indicates something so wrong and says that a judge made a decision in a case. A judge clearly did not make a decision. I would submit that the minister should go back and take a look at the hearings between April 16 and 17. At the end, they indicated that there were no decisions made, and indeed, they were coming back for an update on May 8, 2019.

Would the minister like to clarify whether the judge made a decision on the redacted documents, as I asked?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I thought I was quite clear in that answer.

Again, as Minister of Justice, I have been satisfied that the government and the Department of Justice took this matter very seriously, that we put in place a process that would provide for the defence to have the widest possible access to the widest number of documents that were potentially relevant and that they would then be winnowed down to a smaller number of documents that could be analyzed.

We had a process for analyzing those documents with respect to cabinet confidence, solicitor-client privilege and litigation privilege, and a judge complimented us at the end of the case.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be providing 10 minutes of remarks followed by some questions for the minister.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak today. I will focus my remarks on Bill C-84, which was passed by the House of Commons on May 8, 2019. It proposes a number of important reforms to address bestiality and animal fighting. These reforms would offer greater protections to children, other vulnerable persons and animals.

With respect to bestiality, the bill responds to the 2016 decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in *R. v. D.L.W.* in which the court found that, absent a statutory definition of bestiality, the common law meaning of the term is limited to penetrative sex acts with animals. The consequence of this is that a gap has been identified in the law: bestiality offences do not apply to non-penetrative sexual acts with animals. This leaves children and other vulnerable persons without adequate protections from all acts of bestiality. Child protection and animal protection advocates, and members of the public, have called for legislative action to address this gap.

Bill C-84 proposes to remedy this by adding a definition to the bestiality offences that would include “any contact, for a sexual purpose, with an animal.” As mentioned by other hon. members, this definition would not apply to legitimate animal husbandry activities, such as artificial insemination. In fact, agricultural stakeholders have expressed their views, both in writing to the former minister of justice and before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, that they have no concerns that the proposed definition would apply to current agricultural standards.

This proposed amendment received broad support from parliamentarians and witnesses who appeared before the justice committee. It pleases me to see members of all parties come together in support of a common desire to provide stronger protections for the most vulnerable members of society.

The committee also passed two motions related to enhancing Criminal Code protections for bestiality offences.

The first motion proposed to amend the Criminal Code to provide that a court may issue a prohibition or restitution order for a person convicted of a bestiality offence. In the case of a prohibition order, the court would have the authority to issue an order prohibiting the person from possessing, having control over or residing with an animal for any period, up to a lifetime ban. A restitution order would be available to order the person to repay the costs to an individual or organization of maintaining the abused animal. These types of orders are already available for the animal cruelty offences, and it makes sense that they should also be available for the bestiality offences.

The second motion passed by the committee would add the bestiality simpliciter offence to the list of offences for which a convicted person must adhere to the requirements of the National Sex Offender Registry. I believe that this is a meaningful amendment to the bill, as it would increase protections for public safety by recognizing that oftentimes, those who abuse animals will also commit violent acts against people, and as such, these individuals should be tracked.

Business of Supply

Other hon. members supporting the bill mentioned that they thought the reforms did not go far enough to increase protections for animals. However, I believe the bill does offer important changes that target the most vicious forms of animal abuse, bestiality and animal fighting.

The amendments in the bill would address animal fighting in two ways. First, the amendments would increase the list of prohibited activities that support the animal fighting industry, including promoting, arranging or receiving money for animal fighting. This would make it easier to prosecute an animal fighting offence by clearly setting out the prohibited acts, thereby encouraging more prosecutions under the Criminal Code. The second amendment would expand the prohibition against keeping a cockpit to ensure that the provision applied to keeping an arena for the fighting of any animal. This amendment is particularly important considering that dogfighting is now the main form of animal fighting.

● (1940)

When the bill was being reviewed by the committee, it heard detailed evidence from the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association about the types of injuries that dogs suffered, including deep lacerations, broken bones and infections when forced to fight another dog. Law enforcement has reported that dog fighting, as with many illicit underground operations, is often connected to organized crime.

I am pleased that Bill C-84 will offer additional measures to combat animal fighting and make it easier for the criminal justice system to track these offenders.

The committee also passed a third motion, which the government supports, to delete the section in the offence of keeping a cockpit that required the destruction of birds found in a cockpit. This provision exists because such birds are often injured or trained to be aggressive and are unable to be held with other birds.

I agree with the position that the decision to destroy an animal should be made on a case-by-case basis after the animal has been examined rather than by operation of law. The destruction of animals that are seriously injured or aggressive, with no reasonable chance of recovery or rehabilitation, is already provided for under provincial animal protection legislation and does not need to be included in the Criminal Code. Moreover, it would be inconsistent with the objective of the amendment to the provision, which is to expand the prohibition on cockpits to apply to any animal and then to retain a provision that only applies to birds involved in cockfighting.

The measures proposed by Bill C-84 will strengthen public safety and protections for animals significantly. There has been much discussion about the correlation between violence against animals and violence against humans. In fact, in the United States the FBI has a national database that contains data on incidents of animal abuse in order to prevent violence against animals from escalating to violence against humans, including domestic abuse and serial murders. As well, many victims of domestic violence report that their abusers either abuse or threaten to harm pets in order to assert even more control over the victim. If a child witnesses animal abuse, that itself is a form of child abuse.

I would like to thank the members of the committee and the witnesses who appeared before us for their helpful testimony and

important examination of the bill. As a result, three meaningful motions were passed by the committee and then supported in the House. The discussions that have taken place and the suggested amendments have produced a bill that has been strengthened through consensus and collaboration.

It is important that the bill be enacted as soon as possible, given the importance of these proposed amendments.

I have questions for the minister. I have heard from my constituents that they are pleased that our government is taking important steps with Bill C-84. Some even pointed out to me that these reforms did not go far enough. Has the minister encountered this sentiment from Canadians or stakeholders?

● (1945)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for his work in committee, and indeed all committee members, on this bill.

The hon. member is absolutely right when he says that we have a better bill now in front of the other place because of the work the committee did.

We took two pieces that were generally agreed upon, so it was a targeted response on two specific issues. The bill therefore is a meaningful step forward.

It is clear that we need to go further for the protection of animals. I have said publicly that I will undertake to do this. I did it with my parliamentary secretary at a round table with stakeholders in his riding of Parkdale—High Park. We feel this dialogue and discussion, now opened, will lead us to a better place with respect to protection of animals.

Mr. Ali Ehsassi: Mr. Chair, we also heard compelling evidence at committee on the link between animal cruelty offences and violence more generally. What evidence stood out in the minister's mind supporting the claim that persons who abused animals may go on to also commit violence against persons? In other words, are such offences generally gateway offences?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, the hon. member is absolutely right, both in his question and in his comments, that there appears to be ever-increasing evidence of a violence link between cruelty to animals and domestic violence, sexual and physical abuse of children and other violent crimes.

In 2017, Humane Canada most notably held a national conference, and its final report is online. It is an important piece of evidence. Research from the University of Windsor more recently said that 89% of women who fled to domestic shelters also reported some kind of violence against their pet. As well, there is an FBI investigation in the United States.

Therefore, the evidence is increasing and it seems to uniformly go in the same direction that abuse of animals, violence towards animals is often coupled with violence toward vulnerable human beings.

Business of Supply

• (1950)

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Chair, could the minister tell us how much has been allocated for the investigation of the leaks relating to Justice Joyal's consideration for appointment to the bench?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I have said a number of times in the House, those leaks concerned me greatly. As I said publicly a number of times, I was certain that those leaks did not come from the Department of Justice.

We will have to put together a process in the very near future with respect to the appointment of a Supreme Court judge. We will take steps to ensure leaks do not happen.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, does the minister think it is appropriate to vet the selection of the next judge through a Liberal fundraising or supporter database?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, we have set up with two Supreme Court appointments to date an exceedingly rigorous process. We will do the same with the process as we move forward in order to avoid the kinds of situations we saw with the previous government.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, I understand the minister is partial to oral briefings. Did he receive any oral briefings on which potential justices were Liberal donors?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I am not going to comment on that kind of ridiculous question.

We will set up, as we have done with the other two Supreme Court justices who we have named, a rigorous selection committee, which will look at all the candidates who apply.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, has the minister or any current or past member of his staff been contacted by the RCMP with regard to the SNC-Lavalin matter?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I have said publicly, certainly within the group of people in my ministry, the answer to that question is no. Again, as I have stated earlier this evening, it was the view of my predecessor that the law was not broken. It was the view of a number of witnesses that the law was not broken. I am going to believe that testimony.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, does the minister know of anyone in government, the PMO, PCO or any ministerial or members' offices who have been contacted by the RCMP as it relates to the SNC-Lavalin scandal?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I only know the people I know. I cannot possibly answer such a wide-ranging question. I would ask whether the member wants to know if anybody in Canada has been approached.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, based on the wide-ranging implications of the Liberals' scandals, that question may be appropriate, but I will move on.

In the former attorney general's briefing note provided to the justice committee, she said, "I did make another decision at this time — that I would immediately resign if the new attorney general decided to issue a directive in the SNC-Lavalin matter."

Given that she did in fact resign from cabinet, is it fair to draw a conclusion that the minister, at some point, is in the process of issuing a directive on the SNC-Lavalin matter?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as I already said earlier this evening, I cannot comment on that matter because there is an appeal in an SNC proceeding before the Federal Court. Anything that I might say might have an impact on that litigation, therefore it is covered by the *sub judice* rule and litigation privilege.

• (1955)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, on a half a dozen separate occasions, the Liberal members of the justice committee voted against a variety of inquiries into the SNC-Lavalin scandal and a variety of untoward actions that the Liberal government engaged in.

Did the minister, his staff or officials have conversations about strategy with members of the justice committee prior to any of those votes?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, as the Prime Minister has stated in the House and as I have stated in the House on a number of occasions, committees work independently of my ministry, they work independently of the government and they make decisions on their own.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, the minister says that the government has satisfied its disclosure obligations in the Vice-Admiral Mark Norman case. It turned over 8,000 documents, but 144,000 documents were identified.

Does the minister believe that 5% is an adequate rate of return?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, once again, I would point out for the hon. member, as I pointed out a number of times this evening, that we put together a process. Our only role in the process, in the Department of Justice, was to meet the third party records obligations. We put together a process that was effective, fair, that identified this potential scope of documents and then put together a process that would then analyze the complexity in a non-partisan way, in the sense that the final decision was going to be an officer of the court.

I would remind hon. members that the court supervised this process.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, on various occasions, both the minister and the Prime Minister cited a desire to protect SNC-Lavalin jobs in Canada as the motivating factor as to why they unethically, and possibly illegally, interfered in a criminal trial.

However, no less of an authority than the chief executive officer of the company said that it was not true. What is more, the lion's share of work done by SNC-Lavalin would not be impacted by any potential ban the federal government might impose on conviction. For example, its work on Bruce Power or Ottawa LRT—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Michael Barrett: I am just wondering, Mr. Chair, is the floor mine or am I sharing it with my colleagues across the way?

Business of Supply

Who misled the minister to think that jobs were at risk and that it was appropriate for the government to put its finger on the scales of justice?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I reject the premise of that question.

First, I do not believe I was ever someone who cited the jobs figure in any sort of way. Having been Minister of Justice and Attorney, I maintained a certain distance from the file for the same reasons I have already given this evening, which is there is ongoing litigation and anything I can say might have an impact on the course of the litigation, and therefore I will not say anything. It is covered by litigation privilege and the *sub judice* rule.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, I see one of the hon. members for P.E.I. is over there and he has a lot to say, so maybe he can help the minister with this.

Gregory Cann was appointed as a judge in Prince Edward Island. His wife has been a Liberal donor, perhaps to that member, and was on the judicial advisory committee that appointed him. Is it a normal practice for this to occur?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, we have set up a rigorous process of judicial advisory committees across Canada that are made up of a variety of different people from different walks of life, including members of the bar. That is the first step, the first winnowing that allows candidates to progress.

The quality of our judicial appointments is outstanding. People are entitled to make contributions to political parties in Canada, and it is not a factor in their appointment.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, did the member for Malpeque speak to the minister about that appointment?

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I do not believe I was minister at the time.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Chair, in a matter related to SNC-Lavalin, the Federal Court ruled that the independence of the Attorney General was essential and fundamental to our criminal justice system. Retired Justice Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond did appear at the justice committee. She also said that she believed that what occurred in the SNC-Lavalin affair was a “constitutional crisis”.

We also heard from former Liberal attorney general Michael Bryant. He said that it “confirms the public’s worst fears about the justice system.”

Does the minister agree with these accomplished legal minds?

• (2000)

Hon. David Lametti: Mr. Chair, I will neither agree nor disagree, because, as I have already said, anything I say in this matter could be used in ongoing court proceedings.

I will point out that there are competing versions of the interpretation of the Shawcross principle, and they were evident at the committee.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Chair, the disgraced former Clerk of the Privy Council, Michael Wernick, told the minister’s predecessor that the Prime Minister was “quite determined” to see SNC-Lavalin avoid a criminal trial.

Has a similar message been relayed to the minister?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I have said on a number of occasions this evening, I was not privy to the conversation in question. I have said publicly on more than one occasion that I have not felt any such pressure in this or any other matter.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Chair, some have mused about a plan to prohibit certain firearms by an order in council to be announced prior to the election. Since this is a regulation that would fall under the Criminal Code, I would like to know if the minister is aware that any such actions are planned.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, that question would fall under the usual strictures of cabinet confidence.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Chair, there are currently more than 50 outstanding judicial vacancies, largely in Alberta and Ontario. Is the problem that the minister cannot find enough people with positive rankings in the Liberalist to provide recommendations of names to appoint?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I want to add one thing to the previous question. Cabinet privilege means I am not going to discuss whether we discussed it or did not discuss it. I would counsel the other side not to draw inferences other than that I am not going to answer the question because it might be covered by cabinet privilege.

With respect to justices, we have put together a process across Canada with judicial appointment committees in both Ontario and Alberta. We have made a number of appointments there. We are working through those appointments. We had a number of very good applicants, and we have made a number of outstanding appointments.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Chair, I have a two-for-one question for the minister.

Has the minister explained to the Prime Minister why it is important not to politically interfere in cases before the court, or does that fall outside of his description of his role to the Ethics Commissioner as purely “ceremonial”?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I think the question is evidence as to why two-for-ones are never a good deal.

If there were two questions there, I reject the premise of both of them.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Chair, at least the minister did not say he could not recall.

The chief of defence staff met with the Prime Minister and his chief of staff, disgraced former operative and best friend Gerry Butts, to discuss the Vice-Admiral Norman case, but he kept no notes of the meeting.

Is this normal and in keeping with access to information procedures?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I was not privy to that meeting. People have different practices with respect to the way they take part in meetings.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Chair, I expect there are standards that need to be applied, and perhaps this is another case in which someone experienced things differently from the law.

Business of Supply

During hearings on Mark Norman, the judge presiding over the case said, “So much for the independence of the PPSC.”

Can the minister stand here and say he truly believes there was no political interference?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I have said a number of times this evening, the director of the Public Prosecution Service has said on at least two occasions, including at the announcement of the stay in proceedings, that she felt there was no political interference of any kind whatsoever in the proceedings and in the decision to either lay or stay the charges. The prosecutor in charge of the file herself has said that there was no political interference.

• (2005)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Madam Chair, in the 2015 Liberal election platform, the Liberal Party committed to removing a host of minimum sentences from the Criminal Code, and while I am most thankful that at least in this area they have not got around to doing great violence to the Criminal Code and destroying years of good work by the previous government, I am interested in knowing whether the minister's plan to introduce legislation on minimum sentences prior to the election will happen.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I have stated a number of times, we are committed to reviewing the question of minimum mandatory sentences. They have been found in a number of circumstances to be completely counterproductive. We did commit in the platform to look at them, and we will commit to look at that question at some point in the future.

[Translation]

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Chair, I will speak to two issues: access to justice in both official languages, and genetic discrimination. I will speak for about 10 minutes. Then I will ask the minister questions in both official languages.

[English]

One thing I do want to say before I begin is how much I have appreciated the opportunity to work with the Minister of Justice. Since he has been appointed, he has been nothing but a pleasure to work with, and I want to thank him for that.

[Translation]

One of my concerns is the issue of access to justice in both of Canada's official languages. I represent a bilingual riding where two-thirds of the population speaks English and one-third speaks French.

In my view, all Canadians from all provinces and territories should have access to justice in both of Canada's official languages.

[English]

One of the things that I was pleased with is that at the beginning of our tenure at the justice committee, we proposed a unanimous report that asked for the reinstatement of the court challenges program, with both an official language component and an equality component. That program was restored by this government, and I appreciate that, because it allows official language minority communities throughout the country to seek funds in order to challenge government rules that pose a challenge to their charter rights. That is something that the government did that I really appreciate.

We looked at that at the justice committee. At the justice committee, when we were doing our access to justice study, we also proposed that funding be offered to allow provinces to create templates for lawyers that allow them to enter into contracts in both official languages throughout Canada. It was actually frightening to hear that in some provinces, contracts could not be drawn up in both official languages because lawyers did not have access to templates. One of the things I am really pleased with, which I will get to a little later, is that the government has offered funding to improve that access.

[Translation]

Another thing that is very important is for judges to be able to hear witness testimony in both official languages.

The government's action plan for official languages delivers on many of the recommendations made by the Commissioner of Official Languages and his counterparts in Ontario and New Brunswick in the 2013 report entitled “Access to Justice in Both Official Languages: Improving the Bilingual Capacity of the Superior Court Judiciary”.

Our action plan takes a multidimensional approach that guarantees that participants in Canada's justice system have better access to justice in both of Canada's official languages.

[English]

First, in many cases, access to justice would be moot without a justice system capable of rendering justice in both languages. To that end, in October 2016 there were reforms to the Superior Court appointments process, and those measures are contained in the action plan to enhance the bilingual capacity of the Superior Court judiciary. These changes have increased the transparency and accountability of the appointments process while laying the groundwork for a longer-term vision for continuous improvement, including in the area of bilingual capacity.

[Translation]

The other important change regarding judges is the process for appointing judges to the Supreme Court of Canada. Our government set out to make this process more open, transparent and accountable and to ensure that judges appointed to the Supreme Court are truly bilingual.

We followed that process when we appointed Justices Malcolm Rowe and Sheilah L. Martin. I am sure that we will do the same thing when we find a replacement for Clément Gascon.

Ultimately, it is very important to ensure that all judges appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada are bilingual, and one day, that might be the case for appeal court judges as well.

• (2010)

[English]

I am really proud of that progress.

Business of Supply

I would also like to talk about a couple of other things we have done with respect to bilingualism. The justice committee, once again unanimously, amended Bill C-78 so it would ensure people have the right to divorce in both official languages across Canada. One of the things we heard from witnesses from British Columbia and a couple of Maritime provinces such as Newfoundland was that one could not obtain a divorce in French in those provinces. That is shocking.

[Translation]

A divorce proceeding might be the only encounter a person has with the justice system, and it is a very emotional time. As a witness, a person would not want to have to talk to a judge about such emotional things in a language that is not their mother tongue. That is what was happening in some provinces in Canada.

I am proud that the Standing Committee on Justice unanimously recommended changing Bill C-78.

[English]

I am proud that the government agreed to that recommendation. That is what passed this House of Commons and I hope will pass the other place.

I also want to talk about the enhancement of the access to justice in both official languages support fund under the action plan for official languages 2018-2023. This grants and contributions program provides funding to not-for-profit organizations, post-secondary institutions and provincial and territorial partners, including provincial courts, to improve access to justice in official language minority communities.

Beyond the existing amounts, our government has committed to additional funding of \$13.75 million over five years to improve access to justice in both official languages. These new investments will enable the consolidation of current access to justice activities for official language minority communities, the creation of new fields of activities and the re-establishment of operational core funding for eligible community organizations.

[Translation]

In addition to this funding, consultation with stakeholders is key.

I know that our Department of Justice organizes an annual meeting as part of the advisory committee on access to justice in both official languages. This advisory committee brings together legal representatives of official language minority communities and spokespersons for these communities, such as the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada and the Quebec Community Groups Network.

[English]

I know this money will go to a good cause. We heard from these groups how difficult it was in certain cases to obtain access to justice in both official languages. Despite constitutional and legal rules, people who come from a small rural community often have a difficult time finding an attorney and a court that will hear them and work with them in their language. The more tools governments across Canada, including our federal government, can offer to this process, the better the chance all Canadians will have of seeking access to justice in their official language.

I also said I wanted to talk about one other thing, which is genetic discrimination. This House, by majority, adopted a law to prohibit genetic discrimination. That was a proposal that was unanimously adopted by the justice committee. The previous minister of justice did not agree with that, and a factum was filed by the Government of Canada in the Quebec Court of Appeal, saying that the Genetic Non-Discrimination Act adopted by a majority in Parliament was not within the criminal law power of Parliament.

I have noted with interest that the government has now filed a factum in front of the Supreme Court of Canada, which highlights the importance of privacy and the chance that such a law would be *intra vires* the privacy interests or the right of Parliament to legislate on privacy issues.

Madam Chair, I am going to ask my first question to the Minister of Justice now. Mr. Minister, could you explain to the House the privacy arguments advanced in the factum on the genetic discrimination bill before the Supreme Court of Canada?

The Deputy Chair: I want to remind the member that he should still address the questions to the Chair.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I thank the hon. member for his work on the justice committee. With respect to the power to regulate insurance, the legal argument has not changed. On that particular point, the Quebec Court of Appeal ruled five to nothing in favour of provincial jurisdiction.

However, what we have done in the argument is admit that, should there be a privacy basis for the grounding of such a right to the information generated by genetic testing, we would be open to that. That is quite an important opening and is very respectful of the will of Parliament.

● (2015)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Chair, I very much appreciate that explanation, because it is important for us to recognize that the federal Parliament may indeed have a role to play in preventing genetic discrimination. Regardless of the constitutional or legal argument we use, the objective is the core that I want to reach here.

I very much appreciated the government's decision to support the committee's amendment to Bill C-78 related to access to divorce in both official languages. I wonder if the minister could tell this chamber why the government feels that the right to divorce and the right for other court cases to be heard in both official languages are important to Canadians.

[Translation]

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as the hon. member knows, I was born in Port Colborne, Ontario. Much like Welland, this is a city outside Quebec that has a large francophone population. It is a very proud community.

Business of Supply

Growing up in Port Colborne, I learned that it was important to protect the right of access to justice in one's first language. This is particularly important during a stage of life that may be quite difficult, and even more so when the best interests of the child are involved. We understand this as a government. We accepted this suggestion and put money on the table.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Chair, I have one more question. With the resignation of Justice Gascon, there is now a vacancy on the Supreme court of Canada.

Can the minister tell us how he plans to replace this judge? Will he use the same process used for the previous two appointments?

Can he assure the House that the judge appointed will be functionally bilingual?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I can assure the House that bilingualism is a central consideration in the appointment of judges to the Supreme Court. I worked there for a year as a law clerk, and it was one of the best years of my life. I understood how important it is that judges be able to hear cases in either official language.

As for the process, I am not at liberty to announce that. However, as I have already said this evening, we will have a clear and transparent process in which Quebec can participate.

[English]

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Chair, as the minister is aware, the current study before the justice committee relates to the criminalization of the non-disclosure of HIV. Recently, a federal prosecutorial directive was created, but it applies only to the territories.

I have two questions for the minister.

First, if the committee recommends that the minister meet with his provincial counterparts to seek to convince them to adopt provincial directives that are similar to the federal directive, combined with any recommendations the committee makes, will the minister be willing to do so?

Second, in order to have an even playing field across Canada and to find a way to make it less stigmatizing for people to get tested for HIV and to get treatment for HIV, if the committee comes forward with recommendations to change the criminal law to remove it from the area of sexual assault, will the minister be open to considering such changes?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I say with a smile, after refusing to answer a number of hypothetical questions from my colleagues on the other side of the House, that I certainly will not answer a hypothetical question even if it is coming from my own side of the House.

What I will say is that we are committed to making sure that as many people as possible get tested. We think this is important. As I said in an earlier response to questions, and as we heard in an earlier speech, this is critically important, and I will work with my provincial counterparts in any way, shape or form to advance those goals.

● (2020)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Chair, I would never presume to require the minister to answer a hypothetical question, so let me ask a concrete question. The other study we are working on is on online hate. Can the minister talk about some of the actions the government has taken to combat online hate?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, again, I could tell the House that the Prime Minister is travelling to meet with the Prime Minister of New Zealand as well as the President of France to discuss this issue. It is a priority for our government. Increasingly, in an online world, it is an exceptionally important challenge and if we do not meet that challenge, we have seen the very tragic consequences.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Madam Chair, I would like the minister to comment on a statement by his parliamentary secretary, made in this House on February 8, in which he said that “at no point has the current Minister of Justice or the former minister of justice been pressured or directed by the Prime Minister [or members of his cabinet]”.

Is that accurate?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I believe that question has been answered in the House in an official ruling and I will leave the answer at that. I have said a number of times this evening that I certainly have felt no pressure in my role as Attorney General or Minister of Justice.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Chair, is it possible that if there was no political interference, if that is the case, the reason was that the former attorney general stood up to that pressure?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, again, as I have said a number of times this evening, I was not privy to those situations. I only have noted that in front of the justice committee there were competing versions, and it is possible that everyone was telling the truth with respect to those competing narratives.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Chair, in the recording of the December 19 phone call between the former attorney general and member for Vancouver Granville and Michael Wernick, the former clerk of the Privy Council, over the SNC-Lavalin affair, the former attorney general warned the clerk that the Prime Minister was “interfering with one of our fundamental institutions [and] breaching a constitutional principle of prosecutorial independence” by trying to intervene in this case.

Does the Attorney General agree with that?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I have said a number of times, I was not privy to that phone conversation, which had been taped without the knowledge of one of the parties.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Chair, in the context of the Vice-Admiral Norman affair, there was a comment made by the Prime Minister, who appeared to assume that a charge would be laid before a charge was actually laid. That was characterized by one of his colleagues, the Minister of Public Services and Procurement as “not the best framing of words”. What are Canadians properly to infer from her comments?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I have no comment on the actual statement itself.

Business of Supply

As I have said a number of times this evening, and I think it is fundamentally true, in this particular case the institutions of our Canadian society have worked well. The RCMP did an investigation. The prosecution service with the RCMP decided to lay charges. They proceeded with the proceedings and ultimately stayed charges, and Vice-Admiral Norman had defence throughout.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Chair, from the perspective of the counsel for Vice-Admiral Norman, in her memorable phrase, the government put its fingers on the scales of justice in that case. The government contested the release of information, and National Defence staff avoided using the name of Mr. Norman as a way to keep records out of the public domain, as a way to avoid the legal requirements of the Access to Information Act. If that is accurate, does the minister consider that practice lawful?

● (2025)

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I reject the premise of that question and the various conclusions that are drawn from it. As I have described a number of times this evening, the Department of Justice had a role in the proceedings to fulfill obligations on third party records applications. As I have described in greater detail this evening, there was a rigorous process put together for a wide scope of documents and a huge number of documents in a very short period of time, and the judge complimented us at the end of the case.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Chair, that is not exactly what I asked, so. I will ask it again.

Earlier today in question period, the minister informed us that the decisions on redaction of documents in the case were made by public servants. If it was public servants who used code names in an effort to avoid the statutory requirements of the Access to Information Act, as our Minister of Justice, is it his view that this practice is legal?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I have stated in the House and this evening in the proceedings, public servants had a role in identifying whether there might be privilege attached to the documents.

However, the ultimate final decision on whether a document would be produced or whether and how it would be redacted and on what basis was given to the judge. That decision was delegated to the judge in a rather extraordinary but fundamentally indicative way in which we were complying with the court process.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Chair, are code names acceptable under our Access to Information Act?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I will not comment on hypothetical questions of that nature. As I have said this evening a number of times and described, we put together a process in fulfillment of our third party obligations, which was rigorous and efficient, and we were complimented for it at the end of the case.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Chair, I will not ask again in the interests of time.

I want to go to another important matter facing Canada, and that is the implications of Quebec's Bill 21, a government initiative that would ban newly-hired public servants, including teachers, police officers, lawyers and judges from wearing religious symbols at work. Quebec will be the first jurisdiction in North America to do that.

According to the Prime Minister, this would legitimize religious discrimination. However, according to the Premier of Quebec, trainee teachers who wanted to wear religious clothing should choose a different career. We have something called the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but it seems that the Quebec government has chosen to invoke the notwithstanding clause to override freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

I very clearly would like to ask the Minister of Justice this. How does he intend to address this initiative when it comes before courts?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, it would be a pleasure. As the Prime Minister has stated, we are the party of the charter and we will defend individual rights at every stage.

With respect to the particular process that is now going on in Quebec, it is within the purview of the national assembly in Quebec to go through the legislative hearing stage. That is where it is at. Therefore, we do not yet know what the final parameters of the bill will be, if and when it passes into law. When that happens, we will make a decision at that stage with respect to how we will react. The Prime Minister has enunciated the principles in which we believe. As the Minister of Justice and as a Quebecker, I am watching that process carefully. I am following it.

We will be prepared to act when we have a final product, but for the time being it is in the hands of the national assembly. It is its jurisdiction. There is a robust debate going on within Quebec by Quebeckers on that very issue.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Chair, in an answer to a question I posed in this place to the minister on December 6, 2018, he told me that academic writing had pointed out, in particular an article by Lorraine Weinrib, "that...it ought to be used only as a last resort and after the courts had struck down a piece of legislation."

Does the minister still agree with that? If so, will he be intervening for a declaration that the use of the notwithstanding clause is premature at this stage?

● (2030)

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I would clarify that at the time I gave that answer to the hon. member, I was not the Minister of Justice. What I said about the article remains true.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Chair, I stand corrected. It is true that he was not at the time the minister. I was wondering if his views had changed since he became one.

On a different topic, that is the topic of judicial appointments, The Globe and Mail reported earlier this year that 91% of those people who had sought an appointment to the courts had in fact made donations to the Liberal Party of Canada, 90.9% of those amounts made payable to parties were paid to the Liberal Party. Is that a coincidence?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I dispute the figures that were used in that question. I read the same article and those are not the figures I recall.

Business of Supply

As I have said, we set up a rigorous process for the appointment of judges through judicial appointment committees across Canada that evaluate candidates in a very transparent way on a number of different factors. It has led to outstanding appointments that have increased the diversity of the bench, and we are very proud of that process.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Chair, a quarter of the 289 judges appointed since 2016 had donated to the Liberal Party. A total of \$322,000, or 90.9% of the total amount donated, was paid to the Liberal Party. I do not understand what the premise of the question was. Those are the facts. I would like to ask whether or not that can be reconciled with the notion of a merit-based appointment system.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, it is a right to donate to political parties in Canada and we have made appointments of people from all political parties. I appreciate that the “orange party” has never been great at math, and that certainly was clear this evening.

We have set up a rigorous appointment process. That process is working well. The quality of the appointments is outstanding. The diversity of the appointments is outstanding. The judicial appointment committee has worked very hard at making sure that the first stage is appropriate.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Chair, the Supreme Court of Canada has announced that it will hear two cases in the city of Winnipeg in September this year. Under section 32 of the Supreme Court Act, the court will determine appeals and “shall hold, in each year, in the city of Ottawa, three sessions.” There is apparently the ability under the statute to change the dates of the sessions, but nothing that would seem to suggest there is a possibility of doing what the Supreme Court of Canada has said it wishes to do. I would like the Minister of Justice’s comments on that.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I will take the matter under review. However, the intentions of the chief justice of Canada are quite honourable. When I was a professor of law at McGill, the Quebec Court of Appeal began to sit once a year in the moot court of the law faculty at McGill. It was an outstanding occasion for students to see the way the court operated. Both counsel and judges felt it was a positive experience for a legal outreach.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Chair, in the last fiscal year, in the province of British Columbia, the Legal Services Society, which distributes legal aid, had a budget of \$86 million. The federal government’s contribution was less than \$17.5 million. Just this past month, we saw the province of Ontario’s legal aid funding slashed. More specifically, when it came to issues of refugees and immigration matters, a matter that is 100% within federal jurisdiction, a small portion of that funding came from the federal government.

Is the minister satisfied with the state of affairs of legal aid generally, and specifically in the context of refugee and immigration matters?

• (2035)

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I have stated this evening to a question by one of my colleagues from this side of the House, I am looking at that matter very carefully and understand its importance.

Mr. Murray Rankin: Madam Chair, I am not sure what that meant. I understand from a quote in a newspaper attributed to the minister that he is deeply disappointed to see the sweeping cuts that have been made to this important program. Why should the federal government not pay all of the legal expenses insofar as refugees and immigration matters are 100% federal in nature, whereas criminal law and family law are shared? In this one area, why should the federal government cut the budget entirely for that matter and simply stand by? Should it not pick up the tab so that these very important services can be provided to people in those dire circumstances?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I stand by my previous answer and the citation of my views in the press that the hon. member mentioned. It was accurate. I am watching the situation very carefully.

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Madam Chair, I will be providing 10 minutes of remarks followed by some questions.

One of many things this government has done since taking office is to legalize and strictly regulate cannabis in Bill C-45. This is one of the biggest and most transformative public policy shifts in recent history.

Before this legislation came into force in October of last year, Canadian law enforcement agencies were spending billions of dollars annually to enforce the prohibition against cannabis while organized crime was reaping billions of dollars in illegal profits. It was easier for young people to buy cannabis than cigarettes. This situation was neither defensible nor responsible.

From the beginning, public health and public safety have been the primary objectives throughout the policy development process and the implementation of the new legislation.

Our government has always been focused on protecting youth from the known health risks of cannabis and working to keep those who are under the age of majority from accessing it. In fact, keeping cannabis out of the hands of young people was one of the primary, driving policy objectives of the Cannabis Act. That is why only adults who are 18, or 19 depending on province of residence, are able to legally purchase or possess cannabis. It is also why the Cannabis Act prohibits advertising designed to encourage youth to use cannabis. It also prohibits selling or providing cannabis to youth, and imposes serious criminal penalties on people who break the law.

In addition to protecting youth, our government’s approach to legalizing cannabis has provided adults who use cannabis, or who want to use cannabis, with a lawful, regulated and safe environment in which to do so. Providing a regulated and legal alternative for purchasing cannabis will ensure that the product is safe and will significantly reduce organized crime’s share of the cannabis market.

Business of Supply

When our government embarked down the path of cannabis legalization, we did so with the recognition that such a seismic shift in the Canadian social policy landscape could have far-reaching impacts, including in the area of road safety. That is precisely why our government strengthened the criminal law with respect to drug-impaired driving at the same time. In fact, in recognition of how closely linked these two issues were, the bill to legalize cannabis and the bill to strengthen the Criminal Code impaired driving regime were introduced on the same day.

Among the many changes to the criminal impaired driving framework was the creation of three new driving offences for having prohibited levels of cannabis' primary impairing component, THC, in the blood. These offences are more objective and will be easier to prove than the long-standing offence of driving while impaired by a drug. In addition, the new law has provided law enforcement with the authority to use roadside oral fluid testing devices as another tool to detect drug-impaired drivers.

One drug screener was approved by the Attorney General of Canada in August last year, and I note that a notice has just been made of the intention to approve a second drug screener. I understand that the public comment period with respect to this second drug screener will close on May 20, at which point the Attorney General will make a final decision, taking into account any comments received. This is very encouraging news for the law enforcement community, as they will have more tools at their disposal. In addition, all Canadians should be aware that the police are well-equipped and well-trained to detect drug-impaired drivers.

It is also important to note that police were not starting from zero in detecting drug impaired drivers. Police were intercepting and arresting drug-impaired drivers long before cannabis was legalized. In fact, since 2008, police have been authorized to conduct sobriety tests at the roadside and at the police station to determine if a driver is impaired by drugs. As part of the response to cannabis legalization, more officers have been trained to detect drug impairment and more will continue to be trained in the coming months.

I think we can all agree that the previous approach to cannabis did not work. In my view, the new legal framework, accompanied by stronger impaired driving laws, is a reasonable and responsible approach.

● (2040)

I would like to compliment our government for its robust public awareness campaign in sharing messages on several key elements of these legislative changes, including how to safely use cannabis, the dangers of using cannabis before driving or while on the job, the rules that remain around cannabis and the border and how important it is not to take cannabis across international boundaries. This extensive public awareness campaign was available on social media, online, on television and elsewhere to counter persistent myths and misconceptions about cannabis and cannabis impaired driving.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to mention the collaboration between the federal government and the provinces and territories who help make this profound public policy shift a success. As we know, the federal government is responsible for legalizing and strictly regulating the production of cannabis, setting

standards for health and safety and establishing criminal prohibitions. On the other hand, the provinces and territories are responsible for licensing and overseeing the distribution and sale of cannabis. Our provincial and territorial partners play an important role in helping to achieve the ultimate public policy objective of ensuring that young people do not have access to cannabis and that those who sell outside the legal framework face stiff criminal penalties. The federal government will continue to work in partnership with the provincial and territorial governments to ensure the continued and effective implementation of these legislative reforms.

That said, can the minister expand upon what else was contained in the impaired driving legislation, Bill C-46, and what are the major measures included therein that will help reduce fatalities on our roads as a result of drug and alcohol impaired driving?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I thank the hon. member for his work.

Our government is proud to have delivered on one of its key promises to strengthen our laws on impaired driving by punishing more severely those who are driving while impaired by alcohol or drugs. This has been the first significant reform of the Criminal Code transportation regime in more than 40 years. We have strengthened law enforcement's ability to detect drug impaired driving by authorizing the use of roadside oral fluid screening devices. The hon. member was correct to say that there are two currently being tested and also that the police had already developed means over the years to try to identify the behaviour. We have also placed limits on impaired driving defences, thereby closing two loopholes in the law, specifically for particularly highly risky driving behaviour. It is an approach that is used in 16 states in the U.S. and has been upheld by courts and will save lives and will be compliant with the charter rights of Canadians.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Madam Chair, I have also heard a lot of discussion about mandatory alcohol screening. Why does Bill C-46 allow for it? What other countries use mandatory alcohol screening and what have their experiences been in deploying it?

● (2045)

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, mandatory alcohol screening will support the police in deterring and detecting impaired driving. The evidence clearly demonstrates that mandatory alcohol screening will deter impaired driving and save lives.

Business of Supply

The law does not give police any more powers than they already have under common law and provincial law to stop drivers at random to determine their sobriety, but when investigating impaired driving away from the roadside, police, as always, must form a reasonable suspicion to believe that a driver has committed the impaired driving offence before they can demand a breath sample. This kind of screening is authorized in more than 40 countries around the world, including Australia, New Zealand, Germany, France, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland and the Netherlands.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Madam Chair, I believe that the minister touched on this question already, but I will ask it again more specifically.

After the coming into force of part 2 of Bill C-46 last December, there were some media articles on the application of the new rules relating to the offence of driving over the legal limit, the over-80 offence, which were broadened to capture drivers who were over 80 within two hours of driving. Can the minister explain the reasons underlying this change and further explain whether a police officer can now come to someone's house and arrest that person for impaired driving hours after the person operated a vehicle?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as with any criminal offence, the police have the power to investigate a possible impaired driving offence at someone's home. However, the police, as they did before this legislation existed, have to form reasonable grounds to believe that the driver has committed the impaired driving offence before they can demand a breath sample. If the driver had no reasonable expectation of being asked to provide a sample and their blood alcohol concentration was consistent with not being over the legal limit, they would not be convicted under the new law.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Madam Chair, continuing along in this vein, I wonder if the minister can comment on the charter implications relating to unreasonable search and seizure as pertaining to this kind of alcohol testing.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I had begun to state in one of my previous answers, this kind of legislation already exists in 16 states in the United States. It exists in Ireland, where it is credited for saving lives. It has been tested in the United States under American constitutional law, and we believe it will pass muster under the charter.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Madam Chair, I wonder if the minister could give me some examples of cases in which a person might be drinking in his home and have no reasonable expectation of being tested.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, an obvious example is that the person is not going to drive a car. If someone is going to get behind the wheel of a car and take command of a motor vehicle, it is reasonable to expect that the person might be pulled over, particularly if he or she was also consuming alcohol. It is a pretty clear that if a person does not get behind the wheel of a car, the person has a reasonable expectation that he or she will not be tested.

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Madam Chair, I wonder if the minister could expound further on the value of mandatory roadside testing and what the limitations are around that in terms of charter rights against unreasonable search.

The Deputy Chair: Order. I remind members that we are in session, and if they want to have conversations, they can have them elsewhere.

The hon. minister.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I believe that those hon. members may contribute later on this evening, but we will see what happens.

Mandatory roadside testing is seen as an efficient way to police our roads and make driving safer. The kinds of provisions that we have placed in Bill C-46, which is now the law, will save lives.

● (2050)

Mr. Ron McKinnon: Madam Chair, I would like to go back to the matter of THC testing.

I know that many people who consume marijuana on an ongoing basis have potentially high levels of THC in their bodies. They have expressed the concern that they will always test positive to THC and therefore will never be able to drive. I wonder if the minister can comment on that.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as one of the first jurisdictions to legalize cannabis, we began the process first of all by consulting. The Minister of Border Security, as he then was, consulted across Canada. We are currently testing two devices under my jurisdiction in order to get us past the finish line with ever better methods of testing.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Madam Chair, I have some brief questions for the minister.

It is clear that the government attempted to interfere politically in Vice-Admiral Mark Norman's trial. His lawyer said that we should be very concerned when anyone tries to erode the resilience of the justice system or demonstrates a failure to understand why it is so fundamental to the democratic values we hold so dear. She added that there are times when we agree with what happens in a courtroom and times we do not, and that is fine. However, what one must not do is point a finger and try to weigh in on the scales of justice. That is not what should be happening.

I want to ask the minister why his government tried to use Vice-Admiral Norman as a scapegoat.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I reject the premise of the question.

As I have said a number of times this evening, the director of the Public Prosecution Service of Canada said, twice, that there was no political interference. The prosecutor in the Vice-Admiral Norman case said the same thing. I trust what they say.

The Department of Justice produced the documents. We met our obligations to the court and were complimented for doing so.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, can the minister tell us why Admiral Norman was chosen to be the scapegoat?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I have said repeatedly, the RCMP made the decision to investigate. The RCMP worked with the Public Prosecution Service of Canada to determine whether to begin the process and when to end it.

Business of Supply

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, the PMO decided to lay charges against Admiral Norman before the RCMP got involved.

Can the minister confirm that?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I have said this evening, I was neither attorney general nor minister of justice at the time, so I do not know the details. However, I do know that the RCMP is independent and operates at arm's length from the government.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, who is responsible for the Prime Minister's Office? Is it the Prime Minister or the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, in a parliamentary system based on the Westminster tradition, we obviously all have obligations and duties.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, on April 6, 2017, the Prime Minister confirmed that he supported the decision made by the chief of the defence staff. He said that it was an important issue that was of course being investigated and that it would probably end up before the courts.

What information led him to arrive at this conclusion?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I have stated several times this evening, I was not the minister at that time.

The RCMP conducts its own investigations. It is a very independent institution that we are proud of. It conducts its investigations at arm's length from the government.

• (2055)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, the minister stated several times that he was not the minister at that time, and I understand. However, when he took on the responsibilities that come with the job, he must have been briefed on his new portfolio.

Is the minister in a position to tell us if this situation was foreseen from the beginning? The Prime Minister stated that Mr. Norman would probably be charged.

The minister must have information from his department that would allow him to answer the question.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, the RCMP is independent from the Prime Minister's Office, independent from the government and independent from my department. The Prime Minister has repeatedly said that he was aware of that independence.

We are proud of the RCMP and the Public Prosecution Service of Canada. Both institutions did their job well in this case, and we can be very proud of that.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, the chief of defence staff met with the Prime Minister, his chief of staff, and his former adviser Gerry Butts to discuss Vice-Admiral Norman's case, but he kept no notes of the meeting.

Is that how things are supposed to be done under the Access to Information Act?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I answered that question earlier this evening. As I said, I was not at the meeting. Different people do things differently at these meetings.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, I understand the answer, but it should come from the Minister of Justice or the Attorney General.

Is it standard practice?

Mr. Butts took copious notes at every meeting and kept them all. I just want to know if, under the Access to Information Act, it would be normal not to have any notes.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, to my knowledge, the rules do not apply in this case.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, the minister probably already got this question. The fact remains that we have been asking these questions for several months without getting any answers. At some point, the minister just might end up responding. I will ask the question again.

Hon. David Lametti: Look at me smiling.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Yes, you are quite a gentleman.

The Privy Council Office was firmly opposed to disclosing documents to the defence, including a memo from the former clerk of the Privy Council, Michael Wernick. Does that ring a bell? Canadians have the right to know what was in that 60-page memo from the clerk of the Privy Council to the Prime Minister on an ongoing case.

Is the minister prepared to disclose that information immediately?

The Deputy Chair: I would remind the hon. member that he is to address all his comments and questions to the chair.

The hon. minister.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, the Department of Justice set up a process for us to meet our obligations to the court with respect to third party records applications. That is what we did. Many potentially relevant documents were identified, more than 144,000, in fact. We boiled that number down to 8,000, and the final decision was up to the judge. We worked to fulfill our obligations, and we were complimented for that.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, I want to change topics and talk about SNC-Lavalin.

I would like to know whether the RCMP has communicated with the minister or with a current or former member of his staff regarding the SNC-Lavalin affair.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I have already said this evening, as far as I am concerned, the answer is no. I can only speak for myself and my experience. That said, the RCMP is independent. As I have said many times this evening, it is capable of conducting its own investigations, and it is independent from the government.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, did the minister present cabinet with a proposal to give SNC-Lavalin a deferred prosecution agreement, yes or no?

• (2100)

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I have said a number of times this evening, I will not comment on this issue. As Attorney General of Canada and Minister of Justice, I might influence a matter before the courts. I will therefore not answer the question.

Business of Supply

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, I would like the minister to tell me whether the Prime Minister spoke to him about the SNC-Lavalin affair the day he was sworn in as Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I said publicly and before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, the answer is no.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, I will ask the question again. Did he have any discussions on SNC-Lavalin before that?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I said before the committee, the answer is no.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, people are talking about a plan to prohibit certain firearms by an order in council to be announced in early June. Since this is a regulation that would fall under the Criminal Code, I would like to know whether the minister is aware of any such measures.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I said earlier this evening, this issue is a matter of cabinet confidence. This does not mean we discussed it. We did not discuss it, and I will not discuss it. That is all.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, today the Canadian Press reported that the RCMP says it never saw the new evidence that caused the case against Vice-Admiral Norman to collapse. Every time we ask any questions, we are referred back to the RCMP investigation. The government never has any answers because it simply says the RCMP did its job. The charge was dropped suddenly, when we know the trial was supposed to take place in August, right before the election campaign. Today the RCMP is saying it never saw any new evidence.

Can the minister say anything about that?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I will not comment on what the newspapers reported this afternoon or this evening. Since I have no way of confirming the veracity of those statements, I will not comment on them.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, let us consider the Admiral Norman case. In November 2015, the government tried to cancel the *Asterix* contract that had been awarded to the Davie shipyard. Then it looked for a scapegoat, in this case Mr. Norman, to find a way to please its friends elsewhere in the country.

As Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, does my colleague think that is the proper way to treat an upstanding citizen of Admiral Norman's stature?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I am proud of the RCMP, an institution that is able to conduct investigations and that has a long history in Canada. I am also proud of the Public Prosecution Service, a new institution created by the former Conservative government that is working very well. Lastly, I am proud of my department because we fulfilled our obligations. Despite the complexity of the records applications, we fulfilled our obligations to the court. I am therefore very proud of our institutions.

As Admiral Norman's lawyer said, Canada's justice system works very well.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, I would like to know when the minister spoke to Gerry Butts about the SNC-Lavalin case.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I said earlier this evening, I met informally with Mathieu Bouchard and Elder Marques during my first cabinet meeting, but I never spoke with Mr. Butts.

• (2105)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, I would like to know whether there were any briefing notes for that meeting or whether it was just an oral briefing.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I said, it was a breakfast meeting where we discussed a number of legal issues.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, can the minister tell us whether he received even just a few pages of information about the very important SNC-Lavalin case at that breakfast meeting?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I said, it was a breakfast meeting, and we discussed several issues.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Chair, I would like to ask one last question. Can my colleague tell us why Gerry Butts resigned?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I have nothing to offer the hon. member on that.

[English]

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Chair, I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are gathered on the traditional territory of the Algonquin people. I would also like to commend the minister for his hard work and his dedication to the portfolio, which has seen his shepherding of legislation dealing with criminal justice reforms; important justice reforms that will enhance access to justice; his and his team's work on ensuring that we have a very capable and high-calibre bench through the ongoing work of judicial appointments, and finally, the all-important and historic work with reconciliation as it relates to our indigenous peoples.

I am honoured to be here to contribute to this debate, to speak to some of the concrete steps we have taken towards recognizing and realizing the government's vision of reconciliation with indigenous peoples across Canada.

Our government has taken the time to meet with many indigenous leaders across this country. We heard about their priorities, their vision for the future, and the challenges and obstacles they still face in achieving this vision. Hearing these perspectives has served to reinforce our government's commitment to renewing its relationship with indigenous peoples. We have continued with our efforts to address the ongoing negative and adverse impacts of colonialism, discrimination and marginalization that have, for far too long, been part of this country's social fabric.

Business of Supply

Contributing to renewed Crown-indigenous relationships based on rights, respect, co-operation and partnership remains a priority for the Government of Canada. This is especially true in relation to Canada's justice system. Over the past few years, the Department of Justice and the Government of Canada have introduced transformative laws and initiatives to help achieve reconciliation.

One such initiative that we are very proud of is the release of the principles respecting the Government of Canada's relationship with indigenous peoples. This document will ensure that the rights and needs of indigenous peoples are considered whenever new policy initiatives or laws are being introduced or considered.

Another key document that the Department of Justice has released is the Attorney General's directive on civil litigation involving indigenous peoples. This document will help guide litigation positions being developed. The Department of Justice also continues to work with other government departments to find alternatives to litigation with indigenous peoples wherever and whenever possible and appropriate.

These are both foundational documents that establish a modern legal framework and clearly identify the core values informing the department's day-to-day work. As the introduction to the principles notes, they are "rooted in section 35, guided by the UN Declaration, and informed by the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action".

In addition, they reflect a commitment to good faith, the rule of law, democracy, equality, non-discrimination and respect for human rights. Training that focuses on the history and context that underlie the principles has been provided to approximately 25% of the Department of Justice's employees. It also covers practical ways in which these important documents can inform all the legal and policy work the Department of Justice oversees.

[Translation]

The directive is also a testament to the government's desire to transform Canada's relationship with indigenous peoples and uphold the promises of section 35 of the Constitution.

The directive continues to guide the Government of Canada's legal approaches, positions and decisions in civil litigation over ancestral and treaty rights and the Crown's duty towards indigenous peoples.

• (2110)

[English]

The Department of Justice also continues its efforts to advance the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, including the call upon governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.

Canada has already stated its unqualified support for the UN declaration. Recently, in this session, the House of Commons restated its support for the passage of Bill C-262, an act to ensure that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

[Translation]

If passed, Bill C-262 will bring us even closer to implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It will require us to continue the work we have already started on regularly reviewing federal legislation to assess consistency with the standards set out in the declaration. In collaboration with our indigenous partners, we will also have to develop an action plan for the implementation of the declaration and release annual reports on our progress.

[English]

The Department of Justice continues to advance a number of additional and more specific measures that will contribute to reconciliation over the long term. A key priority for the department is Bill C-75, which is now in the other place. The bill proposes various measures meant to help to address court delays. It will also play a role in one of the most serious issues facing our criminal justice system: the overrepresentation of indigenous peoples in the justice system itself and in particular in our jails.

Bill C-75 tackles bail reform and also addresses administration of justice offences, such as breaching bail. These offences can unfortunately function as an entry point into the criminal justice system and significantly contribute to the overrepresentation of indigenous peoples in the criminal justice system.

The Department of Justice also continues to support and expand the use of restorative justice, which we know is a priority for many of our indigenous partners. It is also committed to supporting innovative approaches to the administration of justice in Canada. This means focusing not just on renewing the government's relationship with indigenous peoples, but building a partnership where indigenous perspectives, laws and legal traditions find voice in an indigenous justice system in harmonization with the justice system regimes and processes across Canada.

For this reason, our government has encouraged indigenous communities to share their views and perspectives on indigenous laws and legal traditions. We are actively working to promote more dialogue with indigenous peoples that will guide our collective efforts to recognize and implement indigenous justice systems in Canada. Not only does this work occur in the Department of Justice, but across many ministries so as to give effect to reconciliation.

[Translation]

The Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada is holding a symposium on the indigenous justice system today and tomorrow. This is a valuable opportunity to talk to indigenous partners, academics, students of indigenous law and public servants from across Canada about revitalizing indigenous law and national and international perspectives on interactions between indigenous and non-indigenous justice systems.

Business of Supply

[English]

The government also recognizes the importance of revitalizing indigenous legal systems. We know that indigenous law institutes, in partnership with indigenous communities, can play crucial roles in understanding, developing and implementing indigenous laws.

[Translation]

Not only are we working on transforming and modernizing our laws and programs, but we also have a transparent, inclusive and accountable judicial appointment process.

[English]

This new process underlines our government's commitment to reshaping the bench to better reflect Canada as it is today and to make the courts more accessible. I mentioned this important work at the outset of my remarks.

Ultimately the goal of all of the measures and initiatives I have just mentioned is to transform both how the Department of Justice engages with indigenous peoples and how indigenous people experience the justice system. We believe that the efforts made by this government to improve its relationship with indigenous peoples has led to some very significant progress and improvements to the lives of indigenous peoples over the last few years. However, much more work remains to be done.

Working in tandem with indigenous communities, we believe we can continue to ensure the implementation of the necessary work and the shifts in mindset required to advance our shared goal of achieving true reconciliation. Our government is committed to promoting, protecting and implementing the rights of indigenous peoples.

We hope that the efforts and accomplishments of the Department of Justice will continue to reflect our government's shared commitment to achieving reconciliation and earnestly carrying out the work required to accomplish such an important goal.

Not only do I encourage the government to continue this work, but I certainly encourage my colleagues across the aisle to support this transformative and historical work when it comes to reconciliation.

I have a number of questions for the minister.

First, what are some of the ways the government is working to reduce the over-incarceration of our indigenous peoples in the criminal justice system?

• (2115)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Chair, I thank the member for Eglinton—Lawrence for his work as parliamentary secretary.

The work that is being done starts with Bill C-75, which was mentioned in the comments by the member for Eglinton—Lawrence. Bill C-75 adopts a number of principles, including a principle of restraint, conditions imposed by the police that must be reasonable in the circumstances necessary to ensure the accused's attendance in court and also to ensure that the entire circumstances of the accused are considered before conditions or sentences are meted out under

that legislation. This will help address the overrepresentation of the accused, particularly indigenous accused, in our system.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, I would like to thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for both his response to my question and his ongoing work, which includes advocacy on Bill C-75.

I would like to ask him a follow-up question. How do we ensure that indigenous people are better reflected in our judiciary, and in particular, on our juries? This is work the parliamentary secretary has given testimony to.

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, this is an extremely important question. We have revamped the entire appointments process to look at the qualities and merits of the appointments and also at the diversity of the applicants. By asking people to self-identify, we have been able to ascertain that 3% of the appointments we have made thus far are members of indigenous communities, which helps the bench better reflect the people it serves.

On the issue of juries, the member knows quite well, in terms of his experience as a Crown prosecutor, that jury selection is critical. We have ended pre-emptory challenges so that we can get back to having more representative juries in criminal cases involving indigenous accused.

The Deputy Chair: Let me remind members that the time for the questions being asked and the time for the questions being answered has to be around the same amount of time.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, I want to thank my colleagues across the aisle for showing such great interest in the work we are doing. It would be nice to see some additional support.

On the work of reconciliation when it comes to the advancement of the legislative initiatives I have referred to, I wonder if the parliamentary secretary might shed some light on the importance, the significance and indeed the historical value of the litigation directive that was recently introduced as it relates to litigation with regard to indigenous peoples.

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, that directive actually informs the entire basis of our approach to reconciliation. It guides the Government of Canada's legal approaches, position and decisions taken in indigenous litigation involving aboriginal and treaty rights protected under section 35 of the Constitution. It creates a new method of approaching litigation.

It is an important directive, which actually enshrines the new approach we are trying to take, which is about working together with indigenous people to address reconciliation, including through litigation.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, in the course of my remarks, I also made mention of Bill C-75, which is an important piece of legislation that would help reduce court delays by modifying several aspects of court processes and trial processes.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary might highlight some of the ways in which we would significantly reduce delays through the enshrinement of Bill C-75.

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the important aspect of Bill C-75 is that it would address delays by not clogging up the system with the administration of justice offences the member for Eglinton—Lawrence mentioned and by invoking the principle of restraint.

Business of Supply

This would ensure that we do not overrepresent indigenous people in the criminal justice system and thereby cause increasing delays by clogging it further.

• (2120)

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, I wonder if the parliamentary secretary might expand on how addressing both administration of justice offences and the principle of restraint, which is so important when it comes to that first stage of the criminal justice process, when accused offenders are making their first appearance before the court, would actually start to help address the overrepresentation of indigenous people in the criminal justice system, which for far too long has been left unaddressed.

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, that is an important point. We know that racialized people, particularly indigenous people in this country, are, in fact, overrepresented in our justice system, including being over-incarcerated.

The principle of restraint is that where there are no concerns about the accused coming to court or posing a risk to public safety, police officers and justices are motivated to release the detained accused at the earliest reasonable opportunity. Entrenching that in law would provide strong parameters to guide the exercise of discretion by the judge in giving bail.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Chair, I would ask the parliamentary secretary to talk about how we have restored important and essential resources to the criminal justice system to ensure that there is access to justice and that we are effecting meaningful reconciliation with indigenous people.

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, we have to complement sound policy with sound resources. We are doing both. We are addressing this concern from a macro perspective by providing the resources necessary to address the important delays that were highlighted in the speech by my colleague.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Chair, one year ago, the justice committee reached a unanimous committee report relating to juror supports. I have introduced a private member's bill that is now in the other place arising from one of the key recommendations from that report. Why has the government today, to my knowledge, not pursued implementation of the other key recommendations in that report?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I thank the hon. member for his work on the justice committee and, indeed, for Bill C-417, which our government supported. It is one of the first things I did when I became the newly appointed minister of justice to make sure that we supported that bill, with the support of the chair of the justice committee as well.

We understand the importance of that bill and how effecting juror support is critically important. I have met with one of the leading advocates to discuss ideas on how to move forward to better support jurors. I hope the hon. member will support us on that.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, I will now move to the issue of SNC-Lavalin, following up a question posed by the member for Essex. In light of the fact that the justice committee's efforts to get to the bottom of what happened in the SNC matter were shut down, why is the minister opposed to calling a public inquiry?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, it is my understanding that the majority of members on the justice committee felt they had heard enough. There were competing narratives and competing interpretations of the Shawcross principle.

I know that the Ethics Commissioner is enquiring into the matter. We have every confidence that the Ethics Commissioner has a number of very important powers for investigating the matter and look forward to that report by an independent officer of Parliament.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, it is pretty clear that the justice committee shut down its investigation when it took orders directly from the Prime Minister's Office, but that aside, the minister relies on the Ethics Commissioner to undertake an investigation. However, the minister knows that under section 9 of the Conflict of Interest Act, the jurisdiction of the Ethics Commissioner on this matter is very limited. Issues around obstruction of justice and political interference would not fall within the scope of the Ethics Commissioner.

Again, why will the minister not call a public inquiry?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, while what the hon. member said is true to an extent, the Ethics Commissioner does have significant powers to shed light on this matter. We had testimony before the justice committee that gave competing versions of events. As I said earlier this evening, it is quite possible that all of the deeply held beliefs in those competing narratives are true in some way. I would add that at the end of the day, my predecessor stated quite clearly that she did not think anybody broke the law.

• (2125)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, the Prime Minister and other members of the government repeatedly asserted that their interference in the SNC-Lavalin affair was somehow justified on the basis of the jobs issue. The minister has stated that he has not advanced that argument, that he has not made a public statement in that regard, but I am going to ask him if he believes that the loss of jobs constitutes a lawful basis to interfere in the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, the hon. member is a lawyer who will understand that when I say, as the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, that I will not make any pronouncement about my own interpretation in that regard, it is simply because there is ongoing litigation. There is an appeal process before the Federal Court. Anything that I say might be interpreted as having an impact on those proceedings and it has been my practice not to comment on that.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, Michael Wernick, the former Clerk of the Privy Council, characterized his involvement as "lawful advocacy". Would the minister agree?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I do not give advice to Parliament as such. I will note that there were different interpretations of the Shawcross principle that were given at committee, and he can read those opinions and form an opinion on his own.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, the former attorney general was repeatedly pressured by officials in the PMO to seek an outside legal opinion with respect to whether to overturn the decision of the director of public prosecutions. Has the minister sought an outside opinion?

Business of Supply

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, as I said in answer to an earlier question, I will not comment on the nature of the process with respect to SNC-Lavalin and DPAs because there is an ongoing appellate procedure, and anything I can say or do might be interpreted as having taken a stance in that matter.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, it is very clear. We know that repeated pressure was put on the former attorney general to seek an outside opinion. One must ask what the basis of such opinion could be, other than to change the former attorney general's mind, especially having regard for section 715.32(1)(c) of the Criminal Code, which specifically provides that it is the prosecutor—in other words, the director of public prosecutions—who must decide whether they are of the opinion that negotiating the agreement is in the public interest and is appropriate in the circumstances. Therefore, it falls on the DPP and not the attorney general to form an opinion, so what could possibly have been the basis of seeking an outside legal opinion?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, again, I will not elaborate on either the powers in this particular instance of the DPP or the powers in this particular instance of the attorney general, as elaborated in the law, simply because anything I can say might be interpreted and used in the course of the appellate proceedings.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, retired judge Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond said that she believes what happened in the SNC-Lavalin scandal constitutes “a constitutional crisis”. Would the minister agree?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, again, I will not agree or disagree in this kind of proceeding, because anything that I can say might be used in the course of litigation.

I will remind the hon. member that there were various interpretations of the Shawcross principle, and that was one of them.

• (2130)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, in the Krieger decision of the Supreme Court of Canada, the court said “...It is a constitutional principle that the Attorneys General of this country must act independently of partisan concerns when exercising their delegated sovereign authority to initiate, continue or terminate prosecutions.” Given what we know about what happened and the pressure that was put on the former attorney general, that would seem to validate the expression of retired judge Turpel-Lafond.

However, turning to the Vice-Admiral Norman affair and following up on a question posed by the member for Milton, the judge in the Norman case made a determination with respect to whether solicitor-client privilege applied to the PCO memos. That is simply not the case, so why will the minister not release the memos?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I thank the hon. member for his question and I thank him for shifting gears as well.

I will say that he is well aware, with respect to the first part of his intervention, that the powers that are held by the director of public prosecutions with respect to deferred prosecution agreements and then those powers that are ultimately held by the attorney general are all described in the law. I would just remind him of that.

With respect to the question on the procedures, I have outlined in great detail this evening that the Department of Justice had a role in the production of documents. We fulfilled that role. We set up a procedure in order to fulfill that role. As the member has hinted, it required a judge at the end of the process to make a final ruling on certain documentation, as well as on their redaction.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, we know that when the former attorney general blew the whistle on SNC-Lavalin and the pressure that was put upon her, she was fired from cabinet and then kicked out of the Liberal caucus. We know that when the former health minister raised concerns about ethical lapses in the government, she was thrown out of the Liberal caucus. Today we learned that Ben Chin, former chief of staff at the finance department and one of the first individuals involved in putting pressure on the former attorney general, was elevated to a senior advisory role in the Prime Minister's Office. What kind of message does that send? Does that not speak to the ethical rot in the government?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I cannot speak in any informed manner to any of the basic premises of that question because I was not party to the various conversations and circumstances that are leading the hon. member to draw certain conclusions. I would say that the government has conducted itself in the best possible fashion in a variety of different cases across the past three and a half years. We have very high ethical standards and we do our best on a daily basis to meet the needs of Canadians and do things for the right reasons.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, has the current Attorney General spoken to the former attorney general about any matters respecting SNC-Lavalin?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, any conversations that we would have had while my predecessor was still in cabinet would be matters of cabinet privilege.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, last year, Parliament passed a motion to list the IRGC as a terrorist organization that would fall under the Criminal Code. One year later, the IRGC has not been designated as a terrorist organization. Can the minister comment on when the government will finally take action on this?

• (2135)

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I would remind the member that this particular matter is under the carriage of the Minister of Public Safety.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, following up on questions posed by the hon. member for Durham in the Norman matter, we know that Justice Perkins-McVey has expressed significant concerns about whether there was interference on the part of the PCO respecting trial strategy. Again, I want to ask the minister to explain why he is unprepared at this time to initiate an investigation in light of those very serious concerns.

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I have said on a number of occasions that I will not enter into the to and fro of courtroom proceedings. A lot of things get said. What I will say, and what I have said a number of times this evening to the hon. member and the hon. member's colleagues, is that the director of public prosecutions has said on at least two occasions that there has been no interference whatsoever in this case, no political interference particularly, and the prosecutor of this case has also said that.

Business of Supply

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Chair, the minister said that he had an oral briefing. In light of the serious concerns that have been raised about using code names to block access to information requests, how can he be satisfied that everything was above board? On top of that, Parliament apologized to Vice-Admiral Norman today. How can he say that everything was above board?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, I have said a number of times this evening that I was willing to read into the record the process that we put in place to respond to the third party demand for documentation. It was a rigorous process, and we were complimented at the end of it by the judge.

[Translation]

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am pleased to talk about Bill C-78, which will have a direct impact on Canadians.

[English]

Bill C-78 was introduced on May 22, 2018. I was proud to partake in the deliberations at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, which reported on the bill, with amendments, on December 7, 2018. The bill received third reading in the House of Commons on February 2, 2019 and is currently with the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs.

Bill C-78 is a key milestone in our government's ongoing efforts to improve the lives of Canadian families. To better reflect the current needs of Canadian families, Bill C-78 proposes to advance four key priorities: promoting the best interests of the child, addressing family violence, contributing to poverty reduction and making the family justice system more accessible and efficient.

[Translation]

We listened closely to various points of view expressed by members of the public, family justice professionals and witnesses in response to Bill C-78. During the study, committee members gathered a significant amount of information from over 50 witnesses and received more than 50 briefs representing a broad range of opinions and viewpoints. The committee reviewed the recommendations carefully, and many of them resulted in amendments to Bill C-78.

[English]

Bill C-78 takes a child-focused approach. In addition to including a non-exhaustive list of best interest criteria, the bill requires that when determining the best interests of the child, courts give primary consideration to the child's physical, emotional and psychological safety, security and well-being.

The bill also replaces property-based terms, such as "custody" and "access" with terms that best describe the parents' responsibilities for their children.

Some groups have expressed concern about the continued presence of the Divorce Act's "maximum contact" principle. First, I must be clear that the new maximum parenting time principle is not a presumption in favour of any particular allocation of parenting time. It states that children should have as much time with each parent as is consistent with that child's best interests. In most cases, this will be significant time with each. In some cases, such as when

there are safety concerns, it may mean very little time or no parenting time for a parent.

• (2140)

[Translation]

Following the committee study, the bill was amended so that the maximum parenting time principle would appear in the part of the Divorce Act that relates to the best interests of the child. The provision's new placement in the act will remind parents and the courts that the time allotted to each spouse must be consistent with the best interests of the child and with the primary consideration, which is the safety and well-being of the child.

[English]

Relocation, particularly moving with a child after separation or divorce, is one of the most highly litigated areas in family law. Bill C-78 proposes to introduce a relocation framework that promotes the child's best interests and encourages dispute resolution. Witnesses praised our government's introduction of the relocation provisions in particular.

Bill C-78 originally provided for the non-relocating parent to oppose a move by way of court application. This was to ensure that courts only became involved if there was a genuine disagreement between the parties. We heard from the Canadian Bar Association and the Family Law Association of Nunavut that having to respond through a court application was an unreasonable barrier to access to justice. This is particularly true for families living in the north, who may rely on the schedule of a circuit court.

Amendments to the bill would allow a second approach, the creation of forms that parents would use to give notice of and respond to a proposed relocation. If a non-relocating parent responds by form and the parties cannot come to a resolution, the parent seeking to relocate would have to bring a court application seeking authorization. Requiring that the notice be provided through a form would promote clarity by prompting parents to provide all necessary information in a consistent manner. Allowing for a form to respond to notice would relieve the burden on the non-relocating parent, while still helping to ensure that courts only hear cases in which there is a genuine disagreement between the parties.

The bill also sets out a broad evidence-based definition of family violence under the Divorce Act that will include any conduct that is violent or threatening, constitutes a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour, or causes a family member to fear for their safety or the safety of another person. The definition would apply to intimate partner violence and to other types of violence, such as violence against children. In the case of a child, it would also include direct or indirect exposure to such conduct. Bill C-78 makes it clear that courts will be required to consider family violence in determining the best interests of the child.

Business of Supply

At the committee, we heard from witnesses who underscored that it can be dangerous for someone fleeing violence to notify other parties of their intent to seek an exemption from the notice of relocation requirements. In response to this concern, Bill C-78 was amended to explicitly provide that parties may apply to a court to waive or change relocation notice requirements without notice to the other party in those rare circumstances.

I want to talk for a minute about one of the objectives of the bill, which is poverty reduction. I note that our government has been focused on poverty reduction for all Canadians, including children, in this case through the Canada child benefit, which has removed 300,000 children from poverty situations, and also seniors, almost a million of whom have been lifted out of poverty by policies of the government that were voted against by the parties opposite.

Families going through separation or divorce are more vulnerable to experiencing poverty. Obtaining fair amounts of child support is a key factor in reducing the risk of child poverty. Bill C-78 includes amendments that will help ensure that financial support is based on accurate and up-to-date income information.

The bill will amend the Family Orders and Agreements Enforcement Assistance Act to allow for the search and release of a parent's income information to courts to establish or vary family support. Parents, lawyers and courts have advocated such an amendment for many years, and we are finally getting it done under this bill.

To further help families receive fair child support amounts quickly, Bill C-78 will improve the Divorce Act's process for the establishment and recalculation of child support. The bill will allow provincial child support services, rather than courts, to establish initial child support amounts.

• (2145)

[*Translation*]

For several decades now, the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada and official language minority communities across the country have been calling for recognition of the right to use either official language in divorce proceedings.

[*English*]

A committee amendment to Bill C-78 will allow parties to file proceedings under the Divorce Act in the official language of their choice. Parties would be able to file proceedings under the Divorce Act, seek an order, be heard, testify and submit evidence in the official language of their choice. They would also have the right to be heard by a judge who speaks their official language, or both official languages in the case of a bilingual matter.

The bill also demonstrates our government's commitment to increasing access to justice and improving the efficiency of the family justice system. For example, the bill's increased focus on family dispute resolution processes will help divert people away from the courts, saving time and resources for cases that require judicial intervention.

Our government recognizes that family dispute resolution may not be appropriate for all families, as may be the case when there has been family violence or high levels of conflict. Bill C-78 was

carefully drafted to promote the use of family dispute resolution only when appropriate.

I am thankful for the opportunity to highlight some of the most important proposals in this important bill, Bill C-78, which I believe would make a significant difference in the lives of Canadian families and children. I was pleased to be part of that process at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in making thoughtful amendments to the bill, which I hope will see a speedy passage through the other place and become law in Canada.

With that said, my first question for the minister is as follows. As I have discussed during my remarks, federal family laws in this country have not seen any amendment in over 20 years. This inaction does not reflect societal change. Thanks to data from the 2016 census, we now know that as many as two million Canadian children live in separated or divorced families.

Could the justice minister expand on how the justice department is promoting the best interests of children in a divorce with this legislation?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, the hon. member is the epitome of thoughtfulness. I think that has come out in his time in the House.

The best interests of the child is a fundamental principle in family law that must be reinforced to ensure that the support and protection of our children are always paramount. Bill C-78, as the hon. member has described, entrenches the best interests of the child as the only consideration when making decisions.

The one thing I will focus on for the purpose of the answer is that Bill C-78 proposes a non-exhaustive list of criteria for the best interests of the child, a list that did not exist before, in order to promote consistency and clarity in guiding family legal professionals, lawyers and courts. The proposed list is non-exhaustive, but it does give guidance. That is a far better place than we were before and it will help children in a very difficult time in their life. Forcing people through the hoops of having to look at criteria is something that is critically important in the framing of judicial analysis decisions and in making decisions that are ultimately in the best interests of the child.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Colin Fraser: Madam Chair, it seems clear to all the members who studied this bill that the high cost of divorce or separation has an impact on all middle-class Canadians. Furthermore, the dispute resolution processes used in court are outdated and ineffective.

Can the minister tell us more about what he is doing to make this process less painful for the middle class?

In addition, how do these efforts align with our other government priorities?

• (2150)

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Chair, not only is the hon. member wise, but he is also bilingual. I congratulate him for that.

Business of Supply

One of the many ways that this bill improves access to family justice is by making it easier for administrative services to carry out certain tasks that currently fall on the courts. This is one way to make the system more efficient.

The Deputy Chair: It being 9:49 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), all votes are deemed reported. The committee will rise and I will now leave the chair.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 9:50 p.m.)

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