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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, May 19, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 19, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

[*Translation*]

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

•(1000)

[*English*]

COMMISSIONER OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The Speaker: I have the honour, pursuant to section 66 of the Official Languages Act, to lay upon the table the annual report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, covering the period from April 1, 2015 to March 31, 2016.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f), this report is deemed to have been permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

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[*English*]

FEDERAL OMBUDSMAN FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Bill Blair (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 32(2), and on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, I have the honour this morning to table, in both official languages, the 2014-15 annual report of the federal ombudsman for victims of crime.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

INDIGENOUS AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, entitled “Declaration of Health Emergency by First Nations Communities in Northern Ontario”. Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-274, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (transfer of small business or family farm or fishing corporation).

He said: Mr. Speaker, my bill would end a blatantly unfair situation that puts business people, farmers, and fishing vessel operators at a disadvantage when they want to pass their business on to a child rather than a stranger. The difference is a big one. For a million-dollar business, the difference can be around \$200,000 from a taxation perspective. For a \$10-million farm, we are talking \$2.2 million less if the owner sells it to a stranger rather than a family member. We have to do something about this. This bill is well thought out to avert any possibility of tax avoidance arising from these amendments. I hope that the members of the House will support my bill at second reading. I am pleased to introduce this bill.

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

* * *

•(1005)

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-275, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (business transfer).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House to introduce a bill seconded by my colleague from Manicouagan. The purpose of the bill is to amend the Income Tax Act with respect to business transfers. As we all know, the population in Canada and Quebec is aging. As a result, there are certain needs regarding the transfer of businesses that are becoming increasingly urgent and important. Unfortunately, under the existing rules, there is a certain tax unfairness that makes it disadvantageous in some cases for people to transfer a business to their children or other family members. The purpose of this bill is to amend the act, specifically section 84(1), to include the children and grandchildren of shareholders, so that they are not put at a disadvantage when family businesses are transferred.

Privilege

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

Ms. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, I hope you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move that, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, the *Journals* and the *Debates* for Wednesday, May 18, 2016, be revised to add the name of the member for Berthier—Maskinongé to the list of nays in division no. 63.

The Speaker: Does the hon. parliamentary secretary have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

PETITIONS

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions today.

The first is signed by 753 residents in my area and the surrounding area. They point out that Canadians are deeply affected by the fate of Mary Wagner, a prisoner of conscience, detained for the belief that unborn children have the right to be born and live, and merely for speaking and praying for that intention.

They are asking Parliament to amend the Criminal Code to prohibit the detention before trial for custodial sentencing of anyone accused solely of a non-violent offence, and consisting of the presence of the words of the accused occurring in the course of the free exercise of speech, by the accused, or the free exercise of conscience by the accused.

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is again from a number of residents in my area. They are calling on the Government of Canada to draft legislation that would include adequate safeguards for vulnerable Canadians, especially those with mental health challenges, have clear conscience protection for health care workers and institutions, and protect children and those under 18 from physician-assisted suicide.

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege to present petition e-48. This was one of the electronic petitions following the introduction of this new petitioning format. There are 14,237 Canadians who signed this petition. It was, at the time of its completion, the largest ever electronic petition under our new system, indicating a wave of support for the proposal made.

The proposal is that there should be no change to the electoral system without a referendum. The petitioners point out that in the case of British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, Ontario, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and other jurisdictions, it has always been the case, and a tradition in our system, to ensure that no change to this fundamental way that we elect members and conduct our

democracy happen without the approval of the people in a referendum.

This is a very strong message from Canadians. I urge the Prime Minister to take heed of this message from Canadians.

• (1010)

The Speaker: I need to remind members that presenting petitions is not the time to engage in debate but to simply give a synopsis of what the petition is about.

The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

PALLIATIVE CARE

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition to the House signed by many residents of Vancouver, with thanks to my hon. colleague from Langley—Aldergrove, calling for the House to proceed with a national strategy on palliative care.

It notes that the House of Commons, in the last Parliament, unanimously passed a motion calling on the House to create such a strategy. It also notes that in the recent Carter decision, the issue of physician-assisted dying cannot be separated from the need to create a world-class global palliative care system for all Canadians, and it calls on the House to get to work on that immediately.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

REFERENCE TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the motion that this question be now put.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I begin, I would like to make a few comments about the air Egypt disaster. Our hearts obviously go out to all of the victims. We do understand from the news that there may have been a Canadian onboard. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families.

I rise today in response to the question of privilege raised by my hon. colleague, the member for York—Simcoe in relation to the Prime Minister's behaviour last night.

Let me begin by saying that it is troubling that we are having this debate. What happened last night was very unsettling for everyone in this chamber. It is troubling, but it is our duty to have this debate if we take seriously our obligations to uphold the respect for one another required in this House to do our jobs.

The Prime Minister's behaviour in the chamber last night was a violation of that respect. His behaviour was unbecoming of the leader who has the privilege, and let us never forget it is a privilege, bestowed on him by the people of Canada, to sit as Prime Minister in this place, just like every one of us has the privilege to sit in this place.

[*Translation*]

In the nearly 12 years I have been here, I have never seen such disrespectful behaviour.

[*English*]

We started this Parliament with a promise of sunny ways, but what we have seen, in particular in the last few weeks, is the furthest thing from that.

It would be instructive to recap some of the events that brought us to this point. As you know, Mr. Speaker, since you cast the breaking tie, the government came very close to losing a vote on a piece of its own legislation earlier this week. Now on a Monday at 12:30 p.m., most Canadians are at work and so were the rest of us, but many Liberals were not. That may have been embarrassing for the government, but the government's arrogance and dismissiveness toward the work of this House nearly caught up to them at that moment.

Instead of learning a lesson from that, the government and the Prime Minister have actually now doubled down. Out of spite, and spite is pretty much the only explanation that I can find, the Liberals put a motion forward in this House that would, as my colleagues in the NDP aptly stated, put a "straitjacket" on Parliament, or as my colleague, the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle said, is an attempt to "unilaterally [disarm] the opposition".

We had already witnessed the government's move to cut off debate on other occasions in this Parliament, but this motion goes much further. It is as if the Liberals sat at the table with one another and asked themselves, what are all the tools that the opposition has to slow down our agenda, and how can we get rid of them?

[*Translation*]

It is as if the Prime Minister and his Liberals did not want a government and an opposition; they just wanted a government and an audience.

•(1015)

[*English*]

That led us to last night's events. Let us not forget why we were in this chamber to vote last night. We were here to vote on how much longer we, as members of Parliament, would be allowed to speak on the government's assisted suicide bill. On a fundamental matter of conscience for millions of Canadians, including all of us in this chamber, the government had moved, once again, to shut down debate.

That, in itself, was unprecedented. On the opposition side, we were here to vote, and we knew would certainly lose the right to speak up any further for our constituents on this bill.

However, the vote was just not moving along fast enough for the Prime Minister. Why should he be expected to wait patiently in his

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seat like the rest of us for a vote to begin? I watched him. He had just entered the chamber a few seconds after I did. He was not here for very long when he strode across the aisle.

I watched him as he grabbed the official opposition whip, my good friend, by the arm. I also watched him as he yelled something so out of line that I will not repeat it in the House.

[*Translation*]

I watched him as he bumped into the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé, who was clearly shocked by his behaviour and left the House, unable to vote on behalf of her constituents.

[*English*]

He was out of line. He had no business on this side of the House. He had no business anywhere but in his own seat.

Everything he did from the moment he rose from his seat was unnecessary and it was unsettling. It flies in the face of any of the promises that the Prime Minister made about decorum in the House. It was nothing less than an affront to every member of the House.

Let us just imagine for a second that other Canadians experienced something like their own workplace, that they were about to sit down for a meeting, but it was running a little late. So the boss stormed into the room, swore at people, and then grabbed another colleague and pull them over to the table by the arm forcefully. What would happen? I think we all know what would happen.

From the beginning, from the very first day, in fact, we have all had the sneaking suspicion that the Prime Minister thinks that the opposition is a bit of an inconvenience, or perhaps an annoyance and in the way of his plans. I would like him to re-evaluate that view because I and we, just like him, were elected to be here.

[*Translation*]

The House belongs to the people, not us, not me, and not him.

[*English*]

The behaviour that we have seen displayed over the last few months, whether it is the eye rolls, or the mocking of some of our members, or the sticking out of the tongue or what happened last night, it is unbecoming. It is unbecoming of all members, but obviously unbecoming of a Prime Minister. His actions last night and behaviour are worthy of the strongest condemnation of the House.

However, beyond that, only six months into its existence, the entire government's approach to this place and its members need a serious re-evaluation.

I implore the Prime Minister to now take a step back and work with all members of the House to ensure that our privileges are respected, that our voices are heard, and that our votes are counted.

Nothing can change what he did last night, the offence he caused all members, and indeed all Canadians. How he chooses to conduct himself from this point forward will determine the result of this Parliament.

Privilege

What happened last night is not for us to fix, it is for him to fix, and he can do that. I have no doubt that we will see another apology, but those words have to be backed by action, action that demonstrates there has been a lesson learned.

It would be a good time to let members speak on the very few pieces of legislation that the government has, without the threat of closure over their heads.

It would be a good time for the Liberals to withdraw their extreme and aggressive motion to strip the opposition of any tools to hold the government to account.

More important, it would be a good time to show some respect for the democratic voice of Canadians when it comes to changing the way we vote in our country.

I know the government has repeatedly dismissed the idea of a referendum, using the absurd reason that a referendum somehow does not include every Canadian.

• (1020)

[*Translation*]

It is insulting. When the Prime Minister shows arrogance or dismissiveness or the disrespect that he showed us last night, there should be no surprise when the government follows.

[*English*]

This is an opportunity for the government to reverse course.

[*Translation*]

It is time to put an end to this dismissive, arrogant, and disrespectful attitude toward members, right here and right now.

[*English*]

The Prime Minister has two options. He can continue on his current path of an unprecedented, unilateral takeover of the House, to which I can assure him we will not be intimidated into submission or silence, or he can work with us. He can work with the House to ensure that we take the appropriate time to study and debate what comes before us by respecting the important role that the opposition plays in our parliamentary democracy rather than brushing us off as an inconvenience to his agenda.

It is our sincere hope that he chooses the second option and restores the dignity and humility to the office that he holds.

The Speaker: There will now be a 10-minute period of questions and comments.

The hon. member for Hochelaga.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, what I saw yesterday was a Prime Minister who acted like a bully and elbowed his way around. I was shocked.

What I am hearing the Leader of the Opposition say, and I tend to agree, is that there is a parallel between the physical altercation that occurred here in front of me last night and what we are witnessing these days in the House: a government that acts like a bully and elbows its way around. It moves motions in the House that violate the rights of all opposition members and give all the rights to the

government members. What is more, it imposes closure at every turn.

Does the Prime Minister's attitude reflect that of the Liberal Party these days? I think that is what the Leader of the Opposition is saying. I would like her to confirm that.

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's words, but I what I want to say, most clearly, is this is not a problem for us to fix. It is a problem for the Prime Minister to fix. His behaviour was unbecoming of the office of Prime Minister. It was unsettling for all of us.

At the end of the day, he is a member of Parliament, like every one of us in the House. We all came here elected by our constituents to do our job. Some of us returned as opposition and some of us returned as government. I have been on that side and I have been on this side. I take my job equally as seriously, and so does everyone on this side. We ask the Prime Minister to respect the office we hold, just like we respect the office he holds.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know in what world people think, even when they are angry or when they are emotional, that they can go and physically touch somebody. That is something we all recognize is just an absolute no. A school teacher cannot do it. Nobody in a workplace can do it. It is just an absolute no. We might be able to walk over to someone and speak to the person directly, but to physically touch the individual is so unbelievable to have seen it, and to have seen the Prime Minister do it.

I wonder if my colleague would talk about that. She talked about it being very unsettling. As we all think about it, it is concerning because if that is the reaction of the Prime Minister when he gets angry, and when he gets angry in this public place where cameras are on and where he is held to the highest account, what kind of signal does that send to not only to everyone in here, but to Canadians who are watching?

• (1025)

Hon. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, it sends not a positive signal, obviously. Interestingly, speaking with some people outside of the House as I was on my way in this morning, some of them said, "Oh, things got raucous. Things got heated. All of these things happen." Actually, they do not happen. They have never happened before. They do not happen here, and they should not happen here. They should not happen in any workplace.

That is why we all take this seriously, and that is why I know you are taking this seriously, Mr. Speaker, and we expect the Prime Minister to take this seriously and do what he needs to do fix this.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition has stated, this was really a violation of respect for not only this place but also for other Canadians. Bullying is just simply unacceptable, in any circumstance, toward any woman or man in our country. I know our Leader of the Opposition is working respectfully and diligently to ensure Canadians are united by having a forward and positive vision.

Could she please outline for all of us here what she thinks that professional decorum should be in the House of Commons, one that was not shown yesterday evening but one I know she absolutely respects?

Hon. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, I have always thought that it should not be too tough to come to work and respect one another. That is how I have always comported myself. I appreciate the member for raising that. At one point, I was named as the most civil parliamentarian by an independent McMaster University study.

Yes, there is conflict in the House. Yes, we have to be tough and ask good questions. However, we can be fair and respectful. There is a role for the opposition and a role for the government. This is the seed of our democracy. This is the place that Canadians, and all of us, should hold to such high esteem. Unfortunately, it was not a good face for this place last night.

The Prime Minister holds the highest office. Therefore, we look to him to fix this. Canadians, and every one of us, expect it. We were all elected. We all ran. We all had our name on one of those signs, just like he did. Just because we sit on this side of the House does not make us any less. I feel we have shown respect to his office. I have always believed that we should show respect to the Prime Minister's Office, no matter who holds it. We should also show respect to every member in the House.

Again, in these kinds of situations, whether in our home, or our offices, whether professional or personnel, it is not my problem to fix; it is his.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the leader of the official opposition for the tone she is giving to this debate. It is dignified and reflects the importance of our democratic institutions. She deserves our full respect.

I would like the leader of the official opposition to share with us her reaction as an elected woman in the House when she realized that the Prime Minister had hurt the member for Berthier—Maskinongé. I know what mine was when I realized that the Prime Minister had hurt the member for Berthier—Maskinongé

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, I go back to the fact that everyone in our House deserves the respect of the Prime Minister, but we should all respect one another. I know the Prime Minister apologized for what happened, and that was the right thing to do. However, at the end of the day, he should not have been down there to begin with. That is the issue. The issue is that he needs to take responsibility for his actions.

We know the member was very shaken up. These things affect people, especially if they have never experienced something like that before. We all are thinking of her. Again, as I said, in these kinds of situations, whether personal or professional, it is not for her to fix this; it is for him to fix this.

• (1030)

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a new parliamentarian, I believe the actions of our Prime Minister yesterday were shocking. The Liberal government

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has talked about new ways of justice, and first nations being its most important relationship. It is talking about new ways of justice with offenders. Far be it for me to dictate, or talk about the Prime Minister's schedule, but it is important that, while we are having this discussion, I hope the Prime Minister is able to sit through it and listen to the comments as to how this affected each and every member of the House. I hope we are able to continue this discussion as long as possible.

I would ask our hon. leader if she feels the Prime Minister should be able to hear the impact statements from our colleagues in the House with respect to how his actions yesterday impacted us all.

Hon. Rona Ambrose: Mr. Speaker, thanks to you, that is why we are having this debate, and people are having an opportunity to speak, and that is right.

Nothing can change what the Prime Minister did last night. However, how he conducts himself moving forward from this point can be changed. I spoke about some of the actions he might take such as allowing members to speak to issues. It is unprecedented that a debate on an issue of conscience, like assisted dying, be cut off in the House. He might want to revisit that.

I also implore the Prime Minister to remove the motion that he placed forward in the House which would strip the opposition of our tools to do our job. Our job is to be the opposition. We are proud of that. We have a role to play in our democracy. Therefore, there are things that he can do. I ask him to do that. It is up to him to fix this.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to apologize for two incidents that took place yesterday in this House.

First, I apologize for crossing the floor in an attempt to have the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes take his seat. That intervention was not appropriate. It is not my role and it should not have happened. In particular, I should not have made physical contact with the member, and I apologize to the member and to all parliamentarians for my inappropriate contact.

[*Translation*]

Second, I would like to apologize to the member for Berthier—Maskinongé. In my haste, I did not pay attention to my surroundings, and as a result I accidentally bumped the member for Berthier—Maskinongé, something I regret profoundly. I sincerely apologize for my actions yesterday.

I would also like to apologize to all my colleagues in the House and to you, Mr. Speaker, for failing to live up to a higher standard of behaviour. Members rightfully expect better behaviour from anyone in the House. I expect better behaviour of myself.

Consequently, I believe that it is completely appropriate for the incident that occurred yesterday in this place to be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for review. I am fully prepared to accept the committee's decision and respect the will of the House.

Privilege

The way members behave in the House is very important. It is important because we are here to serve Canadians, and Canadians deserve to have their concerns expressed fully and fairly in a direct and dignified manner.

• (1035)

[*English*]

I know and I regret that my behaviour yesterday failed to meet this standard.

I also believe that the work we do here is important, and I know that Canadians are looking to us for leadership on a range of serious issues in this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your time and consideration.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Prime Minister for clearly a heartfelt apology.

However, I noticed in his comments that he got to the heart of the issue, which I thank the leader of the official opposition for raising today as well. It is important for all of us here to understand why things have become so heated in this chamber. It is important that the rights of all the members in this place be respected, not just to be free of physical assault, but to be free of having their rights and privileges assaulted.

I noted that the Prime Minister has correctly said that Canadians' concerns deserve to be heard fairly and effectively, and I am wondering if, as part of the apology, he will consider reversing the decision to take away our rights and privileges so that we may all participate here equally in this chamber.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Edmonton Strathcona for her question and her thoughtful remarks. She noted that the way this House has been engaging and the way, indeed, the government has been behaving over the past while have perhaps led to this incident.

However, I certainly know that the member would agree with me when I say that no amount of escalation or mood in this House justifies my behaviour last night. I made a mistake, I regret it, and I am looking to make amends.

I fully hear the desire of not just the member but a number of members across the House, including the leader of the official opposition, that we take concrete measures to improve the way the tone functions in this House and the way this government engages with opposition parties as well.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, we heard the Prime Minister's apology. From now on, the future is what is important.

The men and women here in the House work really hard to effectively represent their constituents, their province, and their country with dignity and respect.

We think that this week's motion undermines our right to effectively represent our constituents.

Since we are talking about the future and a fresh start, what does the Prime Minister intend to do about that motion?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I understand the opposition member's concern about the consequences and the debate that is taking place on a number of issues.

However, this morning, I want to focus on the fact that I made a mistake and behaved in a way that was unbecoming of a parliamentarian. I take full responsibility for my actions and I apologize. We will work together to improve the way the House works, but I know that the problems we have been having in that regard do not justify my behaviour last night.

• (1040)

[*English*]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Prime Minister for his apology. It is appropriate for him to be here today and to take full responsibility for his actions.

In many ways, the Prime Minister is the CEO or the chief manager of this place, and this is our place of work. I was a labour lawyer before I was elected. I worked for 16 years in employment law, and I can say that there is not a workplace in this land where employees at work would be subjected to having their boss, the CEO, come into their place of work, being physically touched, and being moved along.

What I can say as well is that in our justice system and employment law, while an apology is absolutely essential, that is not sufficient. We do not deal with employment- or work-related transgressions and dismiss them and move on simply by an apology. There is a consequence to that behaviour.

I am wondering if the Prime Minister could tell us what consequence he feels is appropriate in this situation, to deal with the situation and the breach of privilege of my colleagues here in the House of Commons, their place of work.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Vancouver Kingsway for his question and recognize not just his expertise but also his deep devotion to workplace health and safety and protections.

We have in this House a procedure and House affairs committee that is tasked with engaging with issues of privilege and issues of mistakes like the one I made last night. I look forward to seeing that committee engage with this, and I look forward to engaging further on this particular topic.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would ask just one question for the Prime Minister. If in fact the Prime Minister is apologizing and if we are to take that in a sincere way, will the Prime Minister instruct his cabinet to ensure that Motion No. 6 does not proceed in this House?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, as I have said, the behaviour I engaged in last night is not becoming of any member of the House, and I regret it deeply. I made a mistake. I am apologizing and asking members to understand how contrite and regretful I am over my behaviour.

Privilege

The fact is that we will now engage in how we can move forward as a House, given this incident and given the broad range of serious issues that Canadians expect us to debate responsibly and move forward in this House. I look forward to working with all members in the House to move the debate forward in a constructive and productive way.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to thank the Prime Minister for his genuine apology with his sincere words.

Being a new member of Parliament in the House, I have to say I find the tone has been a bit of a challenge, especially for the past little while. Does the Prime Minister feel that this justifies in any way the behaviour he exhibited yesterday?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I understand a number of people have talked about this as an escalation as a result of challenges in this workplace, but I refuse to allow anyone to think that there was any justification for my behaviour yesterday evening. It was on me. It was my mistake. It was unbecoming of any member of the House. I expect better from myself, and my colleagues on all sides certainly expect better from me.

Looking at the tone even as a way of explanation for this is not correct. I wield full responsibility for my poor choices last night, and I ask for Canadians' understanding and forgiveness.

• (1045)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Prime Minister's apology, but he is saying he wants to move forward and he wants us to do that responsibly and together. I do not know how we can do that unless he removes the motion he has on the Order Paper.

He would strip the opposition of our jobs. We have a job to do in the House, and we take it seriously. If he truly respects the role of opposition, and the role of every member of the House, then he has to withdraw the motion.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her question and for her strong and measured statement earlier this morning.

As I highlighted, it is important that we draw a clear line between what was my unacceptable behaviour and the general tone of the House. The escalation and the tone of the House does not lead to any justification of my actions, and I accept that fully.

As I have said, I look forward to working with the members opposite, and all members in the House, to improve the way we function and ensure that people can be heard on the serious issues of the day, which Canadians expect us not just to discuss but to move forward on.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Cariboo—Prince George.

The House is built on centuries of democratic evolution in the mother of Parliament, Westminster, and for a century and a half here in the Canadian capital. Members of Parliament are guided by accumulated precedents, by interpretations of evolving procedures and practices, and by ancient custom.

In light of the current question of privilege, I am reminded of the space that separates the government from the opposition. Because early members of the British Parliament often brought their swords to Parliament, we are told that government and opposition benches were spaced two sword distances and one inch apart. Our own guiding reference, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* advises that this space in our Canadian House of Commons serves as a reminder to seek resolution of differences by peaceful means. Well, two swords and an inch clearly was not an adequate space last evening.

What we saw, I believe, and would like to introduce to this debate, was not only a breach of privilege but a contempt of Parliament. I would refer to our guiding tome, the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, where it says that:

It is important to distinguish between a “breach of privilege” and “contempt of Parliament”. Any disregard of or attack on the rights, powers and immunities of the House and its Members, either by an outside person or body, or by a Member of the House, is referred to as a “breach of privilege” and is punishable by the House.

We know that process will be followed in the PROC committee.

However, there are other measures of affronts to Parliament. There is a range of affronts listed, which in various ways affront not only the dignity but the process of our Parliament. We are reminded by O'Brien and Bosc that in one sense, and a very clear sense, “all breaches of privilege are contempts of the House, but not all contempts are necessarily breaches of privilege.”

The authors of this fine book refer us to a United Kingdom joint parliamentary committee on parliamentary privilege, which attempted to provide a list of some types of contempt. This was in a report tabled in the British Parliament in 1999. It says that the interruption or disturbing of proceedings, or engaging in other misconduct in the presence of the House or a committee, signifies and can be defined as contempt. Assaulting, threatening, obstructing, or intimidating a member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties is also a contempt of Parliament.

I would respectfully suggest that the Prime Minister's spontaneous, impetuous crossing of the floor last night, touching a fellow colleague, and pushing and issuing profane comments, is not only a breach of our privilege but it is a contempt of Parliament. The temporary delay of the opposition whip at the other end of the House may in itself have been ruled a contempt of Parliament, but it in itself would have delayed our proceedings last evening by only a matter of minutes, if not seconds, and did not justify the Prime Minister's angry intervention into the moment.

• (1050)

I must say that the Prime Minister's behaviour and the profanity spoken to hon. members last night is at odds with his many statements of professing high standards, opposing bullying, respect for women, and respect for the House.

It is not, unfortunately, the first time we have seen disrespect, arrogance, and immaturity from the member for Papineau. In December 2011, in an admittedly very emotional question period, I was interrupted by a loud, crude insult issued by the member. There was an apology, an apology which I accepted. It was a conditional apology, guilty with an explanation, so to speak, but it was accepted.

Privilege

We have heard the Prime Minister's apology today. We saw humility and I believe there was sincerity in the words that he spoke to the House today. He apologized fully, took responsibility, and reminded us that he will accept the consequences. I thank the member of the NDP who raised the question of appropriate consequences and what the Prime Minister thought would be appropriate action in response to his disrespect for the House last night.

However, we are reminded that the procedure and House affairs committee has a majority of Liberal members and we know, from the behaviour of the Liberal majority in a number of committees in recent weeks and months, that the majority has been used in a rather heavy-handed way. I would hope that when this question of privilege goes to the procedure and House affairs committee, the Prime Minister and the government House leader will encourage the members of the Liberal majority on that committee to put aside their partisan support of the Prime Minister.

We have heard a great deal of excuse-making in the last 12 or 15 hours. Nothing can justify what happened last night. The Prime Minister has acknowledged that in words today. For those who saw the touching, the physical intervention, and heard the profanity spoken against members of the House and said that it should just be shuffled off and taken as a single impetuous moment that is excusable, I am afraid that simply cannot be accepted.

I hope the Prime Minister is sincere in the apology he issued today and that he receives support and guidance from his colleagues and advisers in his recurring anger management and reinforcing his respect for this institution.

Last night's unacceptable breach of privilege, and I believe contempt, was the result of increasing acrimony in the House, and as the leader of the official opposition has remarked today, along with many others in recent days, this is the result of the closure motions and the motion that would strip the House of all of its rights and privileges from now until the end of our sitting in June.

I believe that amends can be made. It has been suggested more than once this morning that the government rethink its interference, its refusal to allow more than two-thirds of the members of the House to speak on one of the most important pieces of legislation that we will ever consider in our parliamentary lifetime, and I hope that motion will, as the leader of the official opposition has requested, be formally withdrawn.

•(1055)

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sitting on this side of the House last night when the event took place, never have I ever, in 16 years of being here, witnessed what we saw last night, and never have I stood and supported the NDP on much of anything. However, last night I could not help it. After the initial event, knowing that one of the NDP colleagues had been hurt, I went down to ask the leader of the NDP how badly was she hurt. All of a sudden, again, the Prime Minister tried to make his way through and although I did not hear the profanity and offensive language, others did.

The hon. member spoke about disrespect of this place. Even today, the Prime Minister's speech was very much about the tone of this place and that maybe he just got caught up in it. We have all seen

that happen on television in other Parliaments, but we have never really seen a president or a prime minister do that.

Perhaps the member would just go back a bit on Motion No. 6 and tell us why he believes that the government should pull back this offensive way of taking every tool away from all opposition members to do their business here in Parliament. It is one thing to do what we did last night, but it's another thing to take away the tools of Parliament to hold the government to account, and make members get up at three o'clock in the morning to come in here and debate in the silence of the House and in the silence around the country. Would the member tell us why that is, by all parties, offensive?

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question and for making the point. That is exactly what is wrong with the motion. It, essentially, enables the government to steamroll its own agenda without respect for the normal process of the House, both in debate and in the manner that the debates would be held. I appreciate his remarks.

The government has said that it offered extended hours of debate on Bill C-14, for example. However, he is quite right that those extended hours, which we refused then, before the motion was imposed, could now be imposed on the House so that members who wish to speak to, as I said, one of the most important pieces of legislation that will be considered in the House in our parliamentary lifetime would occur in the dark hours, in a marathon vote, which is obviously intended by the government as a way of talking out the clock.

I believe that if we are to truly respect this institution, if the government is to truly respect the role of an official opposition, it must respect the ability of all members of the House who wish to speak on important legislation to rise in their places and speak to the issues of the day.

•(1100)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to ask the Prime Minister two questions, but I did not have the opportunity to do so. First, is he prepared to testify before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs when this case goes before the committee? Second, will the government use its majority on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to make this incident disappear?

Does my Conservative colleague think that that is what should happen? Does he think that the Liberals will use their majority to make this all disappear?

Privilege

[English]

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, I think we would have to go to O'Brien and Bosc to find the ability of a committee to call the Prime Minister to appear before committee, but I think that it would demonstrate exceedingly good grace and humility if the Prime Minister were willing to respond to that call. Certainly, I believe opposition members of the committee would make the Prime Minister appear before them to discuss further, and with specific questions, matters arising from this breach of privilege and as I said contempt.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thank you so much for the honour to rise today and speak to the incident that happened yesterday.

For years I worked toward my dream of becoming a member of Parliament because I knew it was an opportunity for me to at least try to change people's lives and have an impact on our country. I hold the House in high regard. I hold all members of the House in high regard.

Indeed, in my very first speech in the House, I offered that I was looking forward to working collaboratively with members from all sides of the House. I offered my hand even at that time that while I may hold their feet to the fire during debate in times of seriousness and when we need to, that I also would offer my hand across the way when they needed help in terms of personal struggles. Indeed, yesterday it was great to see our colleague from Scarborough—Agincourt in the House. I know that he is fighting his own battles. It was great to see him here this week.

I have been sitting in the House for only a few short months and I will be very honest in terms of the respect and disrespect that we have seen across the way by the Prime Minister over the last six months. I will also be honest that he has afforded me time outside of the House when I have constituents who want to meet with him. He has been very respectful and he has offered us a considerable amount of his time. I know his schedule is hectic. But frankly, I was embarrassed and ashamed to have been witness to the conduct of our Prime Minister yesterday. His behaviour was appalling, unacceptable, and shocking. For anyone to angrily stride across the floor like that, elbowing another colleague, is deplorable. That is what we are talking about today.

On this side we have witnessed his actions over the last six months. When our colleague from Alberta was talking about a constituent who was losing her family's house because they were out of work and she was near tears while she was relaying this question, I witnessed the Prime Minister smiling and laughing. We have witnessed the Prime Minister sticking his tongue out at members of the opposition. We have witnessed him saying snide remarks about members of the opposition.

There are times for jabs. There are times for partisan jabs back and forth and we have all been part and parcel of that. But our Prime Minister should be held to a higher account. The conduct is unbecoming of someone holding that office.

Yesterday, when our Prime Minister angrily charged across the floor, he shouted swear words. He was using language unbecoming of the House. I heard it, but I also saw members from both sides engage in some heated discussion. I saw members come across the

floor and I, too, tried to break it up and make sure that none of us did something that we would regret later on.

However, we are talking about the Prime Minister today and the actions that are unbecoming of a prime minister.

I am a small business owner and if I had seen any of my employees do the exact same thing, they would have been fired on the spot. We talk about workplace violence. We talk about domestic violence. We see our Prime Minister who is angered and definitely striding across the floor to show us who is boss, to assert his authority. It is unacceptable.

Parliament should be the pinnacle of democracy. We as members of Parliament should be held to a higher standard and we are. Leadership starts from the top. That seat sets the tone for all, not just on his side, but also on our side. That seat sets the tone for all parliamentarians.

● (1105)

Yesterday, the Prime Minister showed a complete and utter disregard for the institution and for all Canadians with his actions and behaviour. Throughout the day we heard shouts from the other side that the opposition was irrelevant. Then there is Motion No. 6, which is unacceptable. Again, it is just part and parcel of the actions of the Prime Minister who has authority now and he is going to show us who is boss. He is going to show Canada who is boss.

Right now, outside these doors, there are school tours going on, and there were school tours here yesterday. How was yesterday's incident an example for these schoolkids, these kids who are coming here to watch what we do? Does he say it is okay to conduct himself in that manner? Then he stands to make more excuses for it.

The offender never intends to hurt somebody, a drunk driver never intends to kill people, but the fact of the matter is the offence happened. How can we leave the next generation in a better position to succeed in the future if the Prime Minister himself, who has the ability to inspire so much change and indeed campaigned on real change cannot even respect his own colleagues?

It is not for us to determine the intent of the Prime Minister's actions. Only he truly knows what the intent of his actions was. However, offering excuses for the offender, which is what we saw afterwards, minimizing the impact on our colleague from the NDP, minimizing it, and then when our colleague from the NDP composed herself and managed to come into the House and talk about the impact, we saw eyes rolling and laughs from the other side, minimizing it.

That is a problem not just in this House but outside in society: turning a blind eye and making excuses for what happened. We all should be doing what we can to stop this kind of behaviour, and not make excuses for the offender about why it happened, that he is such a nice guy and did not mean to do it.

The excuses we heard earlier are typical. If this were a domestic abuse case and the abuser, the offender stood up and said, "I did not mean to do it; I did not know what I was doing; I did not mean to hurt the person", it would be unacceptable.

Privilege

I just do not understand it. I was shocked and appalled. This is not a playground, nor is it a baseball game or a hockey game. I think I speak for all members when I say that this is not the legacy that we want to leave. This is not the legacy that any of us came here to leave.

Even more disappointing was that when the discussion and debate started, the Prime Minister chose to leave and not hear how his actions impacted us, as if that discussion was not worthy of his time. It is unacceptable. I mentioned it earlier in this debate. If he truly meant what he said and was apologizing, he would be here listening right from the start about how that impacted us.

It is a privilege to sit as Prime Minister. Canadians elected a Prime Minister to what is arguably the most powerful position in this country. He ran an entire campaign on change. This is not change. In fact, it is the opposite. People praise democracy around the world because it allows people to have a voice, and they expect their members of Parliament to carry their voices forward on their behalf, not carry the voice of Ottawa to their ridings, but carry the voices of their ridings here.

A majority government, or any number of seats of this House, does not give the right to stifle debate. It does not give anyone the authority to manhandle other parliamentarians. It does not give anyone the right to stifle members because one's ego is bruised. It certainly does not give anyone the right to be aggressive and attack another member of Parliament, either verbally or physically.

This House belongs to the people, not us, not me, and most certainly not the Prime Minister. Motion No. 6, closure, asserting his authority, all that we have seen over the last six months, sticking his tongue out, childish behaviour, perhaps a Prime Minister, a member of Parliament who just was not ready.

• (1110)

I ask one final thing, and I am speaking as a father and a husband, and I know the Prime Minister is a husband and a father as well. If this happened to any of his kids or his wife, how would he react?

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to questions and comments, just a reminder to hon. members, particularly when recounting the events of yesterday which has given rise to the debate today, that in their remarks, making reference to the absence or presence of hon. members is not permitted in the Standing Orders. They should keep that in mind in terms of their comments and/or speeches.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Essex.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent speech in this place today. I think he speaks for all of us in saying that we need to raise the level of decorum in this place and where we have devolved to over the last few days has become a shock to many of us.

It is not just those of us sitting on this side of the House, but I have to believe there are members opposite who also became members of Parliament to effect that exact change the hon. member spoke about, to do something better, to represent people. However, stifling opposition parties, stifling other MPs in their ability to represent the people they are elected to represent is not the way to do that. I have to imagine there are members opposite who would agree with that as well.

We all signed a code of conduct when we entered into this Parliament, which said that we would be in a harassment-free place inside this House of Commons, which is part of our workplace. We have heard that spoken to today very well.

I want to be clear, though, that in order to restore this decorum, I think it is incredibly important that the government immediately back away from this unacceptable proposal to strong-arm the opposition in Parliament. I ask the member if he would agree with that statement.

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, with Motion No. 6 we again see a government and a leader who are saying, "I will show you. How dare you question my authority".

Whether it is closure on the debate on perhaps the piece of legislation that will have the most impact that our generation will ever see—we are debating pipelines longer than we are debating assisted suicide—it is unacceptable.

Motion No. 6 fundamentally would put closure on any debate, on anything. This has never been seen before in the history of our Parliament. It just shows the length the Liberals will go to make sure that Canadian voices are not heard.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have talked a lot in the last day and half about the incidents that may have led to what happened yesterday. I want to take this from a different angle.

I do not feel that the mood in the House yesterday before the vote was heated at all. In fact, there was nothing really going on prior to the incident. I feel that there is a lot of excuses going on about what led to the hon. Prime Minister leaving his seat to walk across. What really struck me in all of this is that I would hold our Prime Minister to a much higher standard. Members are talking about the tone in this House. The Prime Minister is the person who should be setting this tone, and he certainly set the tone yesterday, a tone that I do not think as parliamentarians we should be following.

Certainly the feedback I am getting from my constituents is not necessarily who was impacted, but the fact that the Prime Minister of Canada rose out of his seat, and in what I would describe as a huff, walked across the floor and grabbed another member. I think our Prime Minister should be held to a much higher standard. Personally, I am embarrassed that our Prime Minister took these actions.

I would like my hon. colleague to talk about what he thinks about the tone the Prime Minister set yesterday.

• (1115)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Mr. Speaker, I have said this right from day one. Again, I am a coach and I am a small business owner, but leadership comes from the top. Actions speak louder than words, and we have seen the actions over the last six months.

I will reiterate that outside of this House the Prime Minister has been very generous to me when I have had constituents who would like to meet the Prime Minister, but in this House, I have seen complete disregard and childish actions.

Privilege

Our tone is set by our leader, and whether or not he is our leader on this side, he is the leader of our country, and actions such as that are unacceptable, here or in any workplace.

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak this morning.

As members may know, I arrived in this House just over six months ago, along with many members here, as a representative for the first time. I represent the wonderful riding of Markham—Stouffville. It is a great honour to have the opportunity that we all have to represent the people of our own constituencies.

In that six months, I have learned a great deal from colleagues around this House. I have learned a great deal about parliamentary procedure, and I continue to learn on that matter. I have been encouraged by the professionalism and the high level of debate and discussion on issues that are so fundamentally important to Canadians.

I think about the times that I have spent in this House in that short time. One of the outstanding memories is of the evening that we sat late into the night on an emergency debate about suicide and mental health issues in indigenous communities. I remember hearing members who were moved to tears as they spoke, and seeing other members who were moved to tears as they listened to the comments that were made from all sides of the House of Commons. That was a proud evening for us as Canadians. We have debated so much important legislation, and we know that the things we talk about and the decisions we make in this House will have a fundamental influence on the lives of Canadians.

This has been a particularly challenging week for us all. It has been a week full of emotion. I certainly have had a span of emotions myself. We have had some real struggles together, and we have debated some very serious issues. Every single day, we, as parliamentarians in this House, need to live up to the expectations and the responsibility that we have to the people of Canada, the people we represent. Every day, we are put to the test to meet that challenge in the best way we can.

Today, I heard our Prime Minister deliver sincere apologies for what transpired yesterday, and that was the right course of action. To the members who have been hurt by the incident, I want to empathize and express my sincere concern for them. I trust that any comments that I or others make today would never in any way diminish the feelings of hurt that they have expressed.

We all have different experiences that we bring to the table and to this position. As a result, we experience events in our own unique and personal ways. In my life, I have had the tremendous privilege of working as a family physician. I spent almost 10 years working in sub-Saharan Africa, and then over 17 years working as a family doctor here in Ontario. I have had the privilege of being with people in some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives. I have sat with people as they have been challenged with facing recovery from illness and disability. I have seen so much generosity and so much strength of spirit and human character.

I have seen those same kinds of qualities here in this House. I have seen strength of character. I have seen resilience. I have seen compassion. I hope that, for my part, I will always be able to remain

respectful and to enter into that level of conversation with members of this House. I hope that fellow members here have felt that I have provided genuine answers to sometimes challenging questions to the best of my ability during question period, and that I have endeavoured to enter into meaningful debate on these substantive matters. I have attempted to do this with respect for my colleagues and with an attempt to avoid untoward language. I hope I have succeeded, but the evaluations of my colleagues and Canadians will be the evidence of that. This is how I will try to proceed in my role as a parliamentarian.

In the atmosphere of an emotional House of Commons that we are experiencing this week, I hope that we will all, as parliamentarians, reflect on and remember the millions of Canadians who are looking at our proceedings and who will review them. I recently had a conversation with one of my staff members, who recounted the experience he had watching question period with his 10-year-old son, a delightful young man whom I have met. His son said to him that they would never be allowed to talk that way in school. That was a striking comment to hear from a wise young man.

● (1120)

Regardless of what transpires in this chamber, each of us has the ability to manage our own conduct. We must hold ourselves to the highest standards, and I believe we are all going to try to do that. Some days are more challenging than others, but we need to remember that we are here to advance the interests of Canadians. We are here to wrestle with challenging issues. We are here to represent the voices and the diverse perspectives of our constituents.

There are some very important issues at hand that we are going to continue to focus on. We have one legislative bill that I have been particularly involved in that is before the House of Commons. It will continue to be a focus of mine for considerable time to come. We have a responsibility to ensure that we find the solutions to the challenges before us. I look forward to continuing dialogue with members on the work that we need to complete in very short order.

I am pleased that we are having this meaningful debate on an important issue right now. I look forward to hearing from my colleagues about their perspective on determining when it would be appropriate for us to move on to discussing other important matters in the House.

I have been thinking a lot about what our constituents expect of us. They expect us to lead in the House. They expect us to make important decisions and to make laws. We do that on the basis of representing the people who have elected us. We do that on the basis of consultation and seeking the very best scientific evidence we can find. We do it on the basis of sound judgment. I trust that our judgment will be deemed to be appropriate.

I want to specifically encourage members to consider some other work that we have before us in the days to come. I had the privilege of speaking to this in responding to questions yesterday, about why I believe it is so important that we try, as soon as is deemed appropriate, for us to move on to discussing the matter of Bill C-14. This is a matter that I have been deeply involved in and for which we have been under a deadline, a deadline that has put us all in a challenging situation.

Privilege

The Supreme Court of Canada has asked us, the representatives of the people of Canada in the House, to put an appropriate legislative framework in place around medical assistance in dying. It has been a challenging task, and we have had to do it in a short time period. My concern is that we must meet that deadline if it is at all possible. The reason I am concerned is because we need to make sure that Canadians will have access to medical assistance in dying, as the Supreme Court has made clear that they should. If we do not have a legislative framework in place, my colleagues who are health professionals have expressed to me their concern that there would be very few medical practitioners and nurse practitioners who feel they have the appropriate framework in place to participate in medical assistance in dying.

●(1125)

Mr. John Barlow: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I find it very disappointing. On a day when we are speaking about something that is extremely important, the first time in Canadian history that a prime minister has been accused of something like this, and the Minister of Health is talking about Bill C-14. There are some relevancy questions here, and I would appreciate if she would bring this back to the topic we are talking about, which is the actions of the Prime Minister, not Bill C-14.

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the member for Foothills raising on the point of order. In terms of the relevance question, it is in the realm of standing order questions. It is true that our remarks in the House do need to be relevant to the question before the House. In this particular case, the said bill that he references was part of the subject of debate for which the House was prepared to enter into. Relative to that particular bill, it was part of the consequences around the subject at hand that is being debated here in the House.

While agreeably there is a dotted line connection there, on questions of privilege, members are permitted considerable liberty to connect various events to their debating points around the issue. Therefore, I think it does stand the relevancy test. However, I would remind the hon. minister to continue to make those connections in the course of her remarks.

Hon. Jane Philpott: Mr. Speaker, I will abbreviate my further comments out of respect for my colleague. I simply want the House to understand, and to make a request, that we consider making wise decisions with respect to when it is appropriate for us to move on to debating the important legislation before us.

The only other point I want to add is that, on the one hand, I want to ensure that access is available and, on the other hand, we have a real responsibility to face that if that legislative framework is not in place in due time, there will not be adequate safeguards to protect Canadians.

I know that my colleagues opposite are concerned about that. I hope we can move forward on the debate of Bill C-14 as soon as possible, which I think is so important.

I will respectfully respond to questions in very short order. I am thankful for this opportunity to speak.

Hon. K. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I grew up at a dinner table where my mother talked to us about how we had to respect others. She did not use the word “tolerant”, but we had to be tolerant of the other kids in the playground. When I entered

this place, the most meaningful conversation I had was with my dad, and I say this to the minister who I know is also a doctor. He turned to me as a physician, and said, “I don’t ever want to see you do anything in that House that you would not have a mom or dad be respectful of you saying or doing in your clinic.”

I have grave concerns about what happened in this place yesterday. I would like to know this from the minister. Does she find that type of bullying acceptable? Would she conduct herself that way in her clinic? Does she find that language acceptable? Would she talk to a parent or patient in that manner? Also, what would be her advice to the Prime Minister on his unprofessional behaviour?

Hon. Jane Philpott: Mr. Speaker, what the hon. member’s question raises for us is this matter that we have all been thinking a great deal about in the last day or so, which is the matter of decorum in the House. I believe this has been an important debate. It is a debate that has impressed upon each of us to take personal responsibility for our behaviour and our comments. It has impressed upon us the weighty business that we have at hand. I look forward to working with all members of this House to continue to ensure that we work in a manner that is both respectful and efficacious in this House.

●(1130)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister’s comments about tone in the House. She is right. When we sat together until midnight to debate both suicide in Attawapiskat and physician-assisted dying, those were good moments. That is what we heard a lot about in the election campaign. People wanted to hear a dialogue and a tone in this place that they would recognize, the way that they deal with their own family and friends, and in their own workplaces. This is particularly why we are all so rattled by what happened last night. It is so out of keeping with the very powerful mandate that the Liberal government received to do business differently. Therefore, I am very frustrated and disappointed.

I am also frustrated and disappointed that I have come to work on four days this week being ready to give a speech on physician-assisted dying, to echo the extremely high volume of mail and advice that I am getting from my constituents. Four days in a row I have shown up ready to give that speech, and the Liberal government has changed its mind, saying, “We are going to talk about immigration.” or “Over the next hour we are going to talk about the RCMP.” How can the minister justify shutting down debate when we need to be having these important conversations in this House?

Hon. Jane Philpott: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for echoing my remarks about the very positive tone that we have had in this House on a number of occasions. I think it has set a good standard for us, a standard that hopefully we can learn to aspire to on a daily basis.

I look forward to hearing the hon. member’s speech. I agree with her that we need to move forward as quickly as possible to discuss the important matter of Bill C-14. I will remind the hon. member that we have already had, I believe close to 24 hours of debate on the matter of Bill C-14 in this House. I know that there are more comments to come. I have enjoyed many conversations with my colleagues on all sides of this House about the matter, and I hope that we will soon be able to resume that discussion.

Privilege

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Health for her speech, and I respect a lot of the things she does here in the House. She has some very difficult files to work with.

I think we have to keep perspective in the House. We are opponents, not enemies, and last night, that aggression we saw was totally unacceptable.

I recall the critic for the NDP asking what are appropriate consequences for actions. The topic we are debating today is a question of privilege. It is the physical molestation of a fellow member.

The Minister of Health talks about being a physician, and I would like her opinion as a physician. If she had a patient come into her home town of Markham—Stouffville and present her with a challenge that she faced with molestation in the workplace, what is her duty as a physician confronted with this? What is her duty to report, and should her leader be any different? What are appropriate consequences?

Hon. Jane Philpott: Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member was aware, as I believe he was here in the House very recently when our Prime Minister issued an unreserved apology around the unfortunate incident that took place last evening. That was the appropriate action.

I want to also commend those who have suggested that this matter be sent to the appropriate committee to deal with it on a further basis and to make appropriate actions. I look forward to hearing about the work of that committee.

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate all the work that the Minister of Health has done and will continue to do and give this House her wisdom in all things.

I listened to the Prime Minister's apology and I accepted that as being very heartfelt. Then I looked at the response of a number of the colleagues opposite, and there were hugs to him, handshakes, and pats on the back, as if he were a victim. That is where I find this really troublesome, because within that framework, there is no accountability or any point where one accepts responsibility.

These were his actions and his actions alone. He told MPs to get the blank out of the way. He grabbed a colleague by the arm, and the unintended consequence of those actions was that he elbowed another colleague. Therefore, if we are viewing him as a victim, his apology is hollow.

First and foremost, given that conduct, would the minister not agree that the first step is to go and get some anger management training?

• (1135)

Hon. Jane Philpott: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question, and I also want to thank her for her very kind remarks. I look forward to continuing to work with her on a number of important issues here.

As I expressed earlier, I want to make sure that the members who were hurt in the unfortunate incident have our deepest empathy for their concern.

I would like to remind the member that our Prime Minister has made an apology in this House and that this matter will be referred to committee for further conversation. I thank the member for respecting that process.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, before I speak to the topic we are discussing this morning, I want to remind the minister that we are not debating Bill C-14 because of the government's actions and the Prime Minister's behaviour yesterday.

I agree with the minister that our life experiences shape how we deal with those around us. I commend her for saying that we must be respectful in our behaviour toward the people around us and in how we deal with others.

What really got to me in the exchange we had yesterday after the Prime Minister apologized was that a number of his Liberal colleagues rose to downplay violence and bullying. They even put part of the blame on the person who was subjected to this violence and bullying.

I would like her to talk about her contribution. What will she do to ensure that her colleagues no longer downplay violence and bullying?

[*English*]

Hon. Jane Philpott: Mr. Speaker, once again, I empathize with the member and other colleagues in the House who were hurt.

My sense is that it is important for all of us to reflect upon our own attitudes, actions, comments, words, and conduct. It is certainly something I always encourage my own children to do, to take responsibility for their actions, and that is something we all need to do.

I expressed this morning the kinds of deliberations I have had on this matter, my commitment to continue to be respectful, and I trust that all members of the House will, in their reflections, make personal commitments as well to proceed in a manner that is deserving of the dignity of this place, and I look forward to the future work we have to do together.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we resume debate, I note that many hon. members wish to participate in the period for questions and comments. I will do my level best to make sure that each member who wishes to rise on those occasions can do so wherever possible, but it has to be spread around to all members who so choose.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Calgary Forest Lawn.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as most of my colleagues in this House know, I am one of the longest serving members in this Parliament. During that period of time, I have been in the opposition, in the government, and now back in the opposition. What is more important is that during all this period of time that I was on both sides, we had a great relationship with each other because we recognized all of us were elected as members of Parliament and, as members of Parliament we had a duty, first to our constituents and second to our country.

Privilege

Taking that into account, I have extensively travelled around the world with colleagues from both sides of the House and other parties including, I must say, the current House leader when his father was the Governor General of Canada.

During all of this period of time when we were travelling around the world, everybody commented on one thing. We visited some parliaments where they were unruly, emotions were flying very high, and parliamentarians could not control their emotions. We have seen in many parliaments fist fights and all these things. There was always one comment, “You Canadians are so respectful of each other. It is amazing to see the opposition and the government working together. We wish our politicians would do that. We wish our parliament would do that”. That made all of us feel very proud.

Mr. Speaker, before I continue, I will say that I will be splitting my time with my colleague the member for Flamborough—Glanbrook.

We had a great reputation around the world for respecting each other.

What happened yesterday absolutely shocked us. The shocking incident that took place yesterday is going around the world and people are now wondering, really, what happened, “Where is this great respect that Canada had?” The respect everybody had in this institution was broken yesterday, and broken very badly.

Of course, the Prime Minister has apologized for that. I am glad he is taking full responsibility, as it is appropriate for him to take full responsibility.

Nevertheless, I want to talk from my experience in this House about what led to yesterday.

As I said here before, we have had other governments. When we were in government, we all respected what each other's government was doing and how they were doing. They had good points. Every government does. However, when the present government came into power, the first thing it did was to insult other governments, other people working in this House, other members of Parliament in this House.

The first time the Prime Minister went around the world, he said, “Canada is back”. In the last 10 years, I worked my butt off for Canada on the international scene, and here is somebody going around, insulting not only the work we have done but also that of the public service and of everybody who has been working so hard over these years.

That attitude is the attitude that is prevailing in the government: insulting what others are doing because, somehow, it thinks it has received such a terrific mandate from the Canadian public. Let us see. How much mandate is that? It is only 38%.

Coming along with that attitude, the government has done everything possible to shut out the opposition. They were in opposition, but most of the members are new on the other side. Some have been in other legislatures, but for most of them, this is the first time they are in Parliament. It is the first experience for them, and the experience for them should have been the Prime Minister, the government, and my colleague from the government who has been here for a long time, all showing respect for others because they were in the opposition.

During the time we were in the government, we never treated the opposition in the manner it has been treating us.

Motion No. 6 would take away the rights of the opposition to work, so it can be part of their agenda.

This attitude that this government has come out with, insulting the opposition, insulting members of Parliament, culminated yesterday in an action. We all saw that action. He was angry. The Prime Minister was angry because he could not get his way.

• (1140)

It is something that he has been showing since his government was elected, absolutely disregarding this institution, which is the seat of democracy and where, through the government and opposition, the House has tremendous experience. All his has been thrown out by the Liberal government.

It is amazing how the direction the Liberals are taking does not respect the democratic institution and that is what happened yesterday. I have received terrible tweets, insulting me racially, but they seem to forget that we were elected. Everyone here was elected to represent constituents.

A member of Parliament on the other side called the previous government “regressive”. Come on, let us be honest about this. We won an election. If we were regressive, does anyone think we would have been elected in 2011 with a majority? But governments change. The last government changed. Prime Minister Chrétien's government changed. Prime Minister Martin's government changed. Governments change, but we do not go about insulting others or talking about the opposition.

We come here with experience. Our job is to hold the government accountable. On many occasions, we agree with the government. As the international development critic, I have agreed with some of the positions the government has taken and I commend the members for this, but that is working together. Now the Liberals have come in with a new bill and they have poisoned the atmosphere here in the House where we cannot trust the government. We are supposed to be working together for the Canadian public, not against each other.

I want to tell my colleagues on the other side that they will get invitations to go to schools. In the last months, I have been to two high schools and tonight I will be going to a school in Calgary to speak to the students. They are very much interested in democracy. They are very much interested in how the House of Commons works. I explain very clearly to them how it works and I never take a partisan stand, but I say this is the way the government works, how the official opposition works, and how third parties work.

What happened yesterday was absolutely shocking, but this is the attitude. I am glad the Prime Minister has made his apology. As the Leader of the Opposition said, he made an official apology, which is the first step, but the second step is to respect every member of Parliament, respect the opposition, so that they can do the job they were elected to do. That is the key.

Privilege

Now that this has happened, we have to move forward and the only way we can move forward is to show respect for each other so we can gain the same respect we have around the world when I travelled and everyone said they were very much impressed with the workings of the Canadian Parliament.

• (1145)

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reason I stand is that I have been overwhelmed and alarmed by what happened yesterday.

I came to Canada 38 years ago as an immigrant because I admired Canadian values: freedom of speech, democracy, and rule of law. As mentioned by colleagues who were teachers, I have been a teacher all my life starting in Hong Kong where I was an elementary school teacher. I was a high school teacher, a college teacher, and in Canada, before I went into politics, I was also a university professor.

What happened yesterday was completely unacceptable. As I travel around the world, as the hon. member just said, Canada has been admired as a model for true democracy. However, in the past few months, we have not seen that happen, and what happened yesterday was even worse.

I ask my colleague how we can represent our constituents when we cannot stand here to speak on their behalf to protect the most vulnerable.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for what she said about coming to Canada. Thousands and thousands have come to Canada, including myself. This is a land of immigrants.

Yesterday started as a great day, with the apology to the South Asian community on the ills of the past. It started as a great day and it ended with the Prime Minister absolutely destroying what should have been one of the best days for Canada with his actions.

Again I agree with the member, apologizing is not going to solve the problem. There is a fundamental flaw in the government, and that is that it is not respecting the opposition. It is trying to take away the powers of the opposition. That is a fundamental issue with what the government is doing. If it does not correct that, their attitude will remain poisonous.

Therefore, as the Leader of the Opposition has appealed and we are appealing, let the Parliament do its work.

• (1150)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of words to describe the Prime Minister's conduct yesterday. It certainly was unparliamentary. It was unprofessional. It was unbecoming of a Prime Minister. However, let us not lose sight of what actually took place.

What took place yesterday was an assault, a criminal assault. The Prime Minister walked over, there was clear mens rea, and he grabbed and dragged the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

I was wondering if the hon. member for Calgary Forest Lawn might be able to comment on the fact that what took place yesterday in the House by the first minister, the Prime Minister of Canada, was an assault.

Hon. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, yes, it did look like it was an assault.

It was something in the House of Commons that never should have taken place. When touching anybody, intentionally or unintentionally, one has to be responsible for their actions. For the Prime Minister to go out there and pull the whip's hand, which we all saw on the video, it was really not very appropriate.

When he got up immediately after that yesterday, he tried to defend himself. He tried to defend himself. Not only that, members of the Liberal Party tried to defend his actions. They cannot defend what was very clearly on the video. What was even more terrible was that the Liberal members were doubting the statements of members on this side who witnessed everything. They were not respecting what was being said over here.

As a matter of fact, one member of Parliament sitting way at the other end thought she saw the whole thing. Sitting here, I could not see because there were too many people around.

Those who were there, who witnessed it, and who spoke about it, their testimony should have been respected. It was not respected.

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I usually stand up and say that I am honoured to speak to the issue. I cannot say that today.

I want to make my comments in light of the fact that the 338 seats here in the House, no matter where they are, represent individuals who have the extraordinary opportunity, the great blessing, of having the trust of enough people in the ridings they represent to send them here to represent them in the greatest democracy in the world. We come here humbled by that—or we should be humbled by that—knowing that we serve at their behest and we serve because they trust us to come here and not only represent them legislatively and regulatorily, but also to represent them in a fashion that would be becoming of those who would be the leaders of this great federation.

I want to make my comments in light of that reality that we live every day here in the House, being people who have a great honour and blessing to represent their constituents, in my case the people of Flamborough—Glanbrook.

I just have five points that I will get through in the brief time that I have, which I think the Prime Minister should consider.

The first point is that the Prime Minister's actions reflect on this entire chamber. In fact, the Prime Minister's actions reflect on every member here and on every Canadian citizen. I know that Her Majesty is the head of the state in our Westminster tradition, but the Prime Minister's position publicly is often indistinguishable from that of Her Majesty in regard to who is seen as the leader of this country. When the Prime Minister behaves in the fashion he did yesterday, it stains the institution, it stains us, and it stains every Canadian.

Privilege

The second consideration I would like to pose to the Prime Minister would be the rationalization by some of his members of what happened yesterday. One of the grave concerns that I have is that a number of members from the Liberal bench stood up almost immediately and tried to rationalize the behaviour. They phrased the reaction of the member for Berthier—Maskinongé as a dive in sports. That took us to a new level of degradation after the very inappropriate actions of the Prime Minister happened. One rationalization was that somehow the delay by the opposition whip was justification for the behaviour. There should be lots of thought and consideration on the other bench and by the Prime Minister in that regard.

Another thing I would like to say is that I have never been involved in martial arts, but I had a lot of friends who were active in martial arts. The Prime Minister is active in martial arts. He is a proven boxer, and that fact he does not hide. In fact, he pretty well promotes his prowess in the martial sport quite actively publicly. All those people whom I have known who have been trained in combative sports and martial arts have always made a covenant with themselves, knowing that their capability is greater than the average person to harm someone, that they take double restraint and ensure that they do not take any kind of action that would cause harm to someone. It is not only the Prime Minister's position, but it is by the very fact that he is trained in these martial arts, he has a double duty to be responsible for the kind of strength that he yields. This should have been known by the Prime Minister and should be one of his highest commitments to himself.

What came up in the last question and answer session was interesting.

• (1155)

I would like to read into the record section 265(1) of the Criminal Code, which states:

A person commits an assault when

(a) without the consent of another person, he applies force intentionally to that other person, directly or indirectly;

(b) he attempts or threatens, by an act or a gesture, to apply force to another person, if he has, or causes that other person to believe on reasonable grounds that he has, present ability to effect his purpose;...

We are not all lawyers here, but we sit as legislators. People should be well aware of the common law and certainly mindful of when we come close to or intend to break the law. I will leave that for the record and ask the Prime Minister to contemplate that section of the Criminal Code.

Finally, I am gravely concerned about the pattern of behaviour that has led us to today. To begin this session of Parliament, instead of the government implementing its agenda and campaign promises, it began spitefully repealing legislation. I do not remember a time in the history of the House when a government began by ensuring it tore down everything the previous government did.

Then it quickly moved to do something that Liberals said they would never do, and that is to shut down debate. It did not take very long at all. They not only shut it down once, but did it repeatedly, bill after bill.

Then the Liberals did something truly unprecedented. They changed the legislative calendar so members of Parliament would

not even know what bill was coming up. Therefore, it would be impossible for them to effectively represent the very people who elected them to come here. This was done wantonly and without apology. Then, of course, the draconian motion to essentially remove all of the tools that the opposition has to represent the 60%-plus of people who did not vote for a Liberal member of Parliament is cause for real concern.

There is a pattern of behaviour that culminated last night with the Prime Minister leaving his seat, crossing the aisle, barging through opposition members to grab the opposition whip, drag him forward, and then get out of his seat a second time to confront the opposition again. This pattern of behaviour is very troubling and causes me great concern about where we go from here.

I have heard the apology by the Prime Minister. I hope it was sincere. One thing was said this morning during the National Prayer Breakfast. This morning's speaker said that we would know when someone had actually had a change of heart because the person would behave differently. We will be watching for that new behaviour, that new spirit of decorum, and willingness to work with the opposition, so we can continue to serve our constituents, be responsible to those who elected us, and, as we say everyday, make good laws and serve ordinary Canadians.

• (1200)

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, I am a new parliamentarian. My hon. colleague spoke of how hard we worked to get to this place and that we were all here to try to make a difference in our communities and, indeed, the country. What we witnessed yesterday was troubling, but we have seen more and more of these types of actions over the last six months.

What would happen if those actions took place just outside of the doors, if there were unwanted grabbing, pressure, and pulling? The member mentioned that it was assault, but what would have taken place outside of the doors?

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I read section 265(1). Clearly, if someone outside of these doors grabs somebody by the arm and drag the person down the hall unwillingly, it would be committing an offence. That is the average person, let alone someone who is entrusted with highest elected office in the federal government. Not only is it the responsibility of the Prime Minister to act in accordance with the laws of Canada, but to set an example, a much higher example, based on the office and responsibility he holds.

If behaviour like that occurred outside of the doors in front of a law enforcement officer, there would be consequences and they would have to be dealt with.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was right here. It was six feet away from me so I saw what happened yesterday. I was in a state of shock as I watched it happen. The Prime Minister came over the first time and then he came over a second time. I could not believe what I was seeing.

However, on reflection and hearing what others have said, I sense there is a pattern, that this is not a one-off incident for which the Prime Minister is now apologizing.

Privilege

We have heard about Motion No. 6 and what that would do. We have seen the domineering and dictatorial approaches in committee practice. There is a tone in the House. Who is responsible for setting that tone? Is it the government? If tension in the House has built up to a manifestation that we experienced yesterday, are other things adding to it? Does he think this is a one-off, or is this a pattern that is really concerning, one which the government needs to address? We may even be dealing with a bigger issue.

There is the apology for an assault, but could the member comment on the bigger picture? What is happening in the House that we have never seen happen before.

• (1205)

Mr. David Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I alluded to this as far as a pattern of behaviour. I was hopeful. A lot of positive words were said during the campaign and after the campaign. I thought we might have a good working relationship. Then the evidence started to build from the time when the Liberal Party took government and started to simply repeal legislation, piece after piece, then started to call time allocation to restrict our capability of debating.

Then there was something unprecedented, a change in the calendar midstream after an agreement. Agreements are traditionally kept. Promises are made and kept by House leaders, but the calendar was then changed so nobody could prepare for debate.

Of course there is the draconian motion that would take away our capabilities of being able to represent our constituents properly. Then there is the behaviour. Yes, I am very concerned a pattern is evolving here, and it is troubling and worsening.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are certainly not here today debating if yesterday's behaviour or conduct was appropriate. I think we would all say that what we witnessed yesterday was not what we wanted to see in the House.

However, today I rise to speak to a question of privilege raised last evening. That question of privilege concerns the actions of the Prime Minister in regards to last evening's incident.

I would begin by noting that the Prime Minister yesterday, and today, at the first opportunity, rose to offer his heartfelt apology for his actions, for which he took full responsibility. I spoke to him at length last night, and other people on his team, and there is no doubt that the Prime Minister's apology is both fulsome and extremely sincere.

Yesterday was a highly emotional day on many fronts. Many of us had been listening to Canadians about their thoughts on the medical assistance in dying bill, which is before the House at this time. Frustrations with the progress of the bill and other matters have caused emotions to run very high on both sides of the House, both in the front benches and also in the backbenches.

The Prime Minister has made commitments and followed through on them to try to make the House a more functional and respectful institution. He is, however, like everyone else who is sitting here, fallible. He has never professed to be anything but that. He let his emotions take a hold of his better judgment and conducted himself in a way that he himself said was unacceptable.

We do in the House have a tradition that we take members at their word and accept their truthfulness in their statements. The Prime Minister's apology was unreserved and absolute. I think that everyone who has met the Prime Minister, and those who know him, know that he sometimes wears his heart on his sleeve, and that he is an honourable man in every sense of the word.

Let us go over what happened yesterday, and I hope we can kind of put a few facts to the situation.

As the chamber prepared to vote, there was some obstruction in the aisle, apparently intentional, delaying the proceedings. The Prime Minister then rose, crossed the aisle, and intervened to expedite the Conservative's whip's progress so the vote could proceed. In the course of this intervention, the Prime Minister unintentionally made contact with the member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

The member for Berthier—Maskinongé was understandably upset by the incident and left the chamber. I can completely appreciate what she was going through. The member did not record her vote as a result of these events. The outcome, we can agree, was absolutely not right, and we saw that.

The member for Berthier—Maskinongé stated that she was unable to vote. She was undoubtedly shaken up by this very unfortunate incident. Therefore, I believe one action that could be taken would be to seek unanimous consent for the member's vote to be recorded in the manner in which she wished to vote. I can assure the House that if such a motion were to be made, that this side of the House would absolutely agree with it.

Twice, if not three times, the Prime Minister has sincerely apologized for his inadvisable actions. Physical intervention is never appropriate in this chamber. However, in so far as the Prime Minister made contact with the member for Berthier—Maskinongé, and in so far as he may have thereby interfered with her privilege as a parliamentarian, it was unintentional. This is the truth. Video of the event will absolutely confirm this.

As well, I found it of great benefit yesterday when I was in the House to hear a fair account of the event from the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. The member had a close and clear view of the situation, in which she was not involved. In addition, not belonging to any caucus involved, that independence may afford her a greater degree of objectivity in observing, assessing, and describing the events. I would quote her remarks as follows:

What we saw was unacceptable, but let us keep it in perspective. What I saw that was unwise and unacceptable was that Prime Minister deliberately trying to move a vote along. There was some mischief. Let us face it. There was some mischief on the floor... there was an attempt to slow down the vote. There is no doubt about that, but it was innocent mischief..

The member for Saanich—Gulf Islands continued to say that:

I am trying to keep this in perspective....It was most unwise of the Prime Minister to attempt to move along the vote by moving along the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes. That movement was clearly contact that was unwanted.

Privilege

• (1210)

The second contact with my friend, the member for Berthier—Maskinongé, which was certainly the one that was the most emotional for the member involved, was clearly, from my perspective, and I confirm what the member for King—Vaughan said, unintentional. I have to say that I saw the Prime Minister following the hon. member, trying to reach her, saying how very sorry he was, that he had not seen her behind him. That is the truth. Members can like it or not like it, but nothing that happened here today reflects well on us.

That is a fair and reasonable account of the situation. To summarize, there was some mischief delaying the proceedings. The Prime Minister chose to intervene. He agrees this was inadvisable and unacceptable, and has offered an unreserved apology to the House for his actions.

In the course of his interventions, the Prime Minister made unintentional contact with the member for Berthier—Maskinongé. That was an accident. However, the member was justly aggrieved at the contact, no matter it was accidental, and for that, the Prime Minister has also apologized not only to the chamber but personally to the member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

The Prime Minister is very sorry. He said:

Mr. Speaker, I want to take the opportunity, now that the member is able to return to the House, to express directly to her my apologies for my behaviour and my actions, unreservedly.

The physical integrity of members of the House is and must be imperative. This is at the heart of our democracy. Cooler heads must prevail. We must not lose our respect, our sense of collegiality, and our sense of shared purpose. That statement would justly apply to attempts to delay or disrupt our democratic proceedings. However, that statement would also apply to our responses to disruption.

The Prime Minister's actions to intervene were inadvisable and unacceptable. The accidental results were inappropriate, and I must underline that. So far, the Prime Minister has apologized on several occasions. However, I would take issue with any member who would suggest the Prime Minister intentionally made contact with the member for Berthier—Maskinongé. To make such a suggestion is not letting cooler heads prevail. It is not making a fair and reasonable judgment of the situation. To allege that this was an instance of gender-based violence is making light of violence.

I can tell members that I know a lot about violence. For the past 24 years, before entering public life, I was the coordinator of the Codiac RCMP victim services program. I have worked with thousands of victims of violence: victims of domestic violence, victims of sexual violence, victims of random violence, and the list goes on. I certainly do know the consequences of violence. I have also provided crisis counselling, crisis intervention, and risk assessments for many of the victims I have worked with. Also, I was the chair of the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women. My role was truly to promote women's rights and equality.

What took place yesterday was inadvisable, but to call it gender-based violence, to make exaggerations and misrepresentations about the nature of the incident is really irresponsible and wrong. It does not help us take the culture in this place where it needs to be, and it does a disservice to victims of violence.

In this chamber, none would condone violence, but this was not gender-based violence. Calling it such is wrong, and two wrongs do

not make a right. We have a duty to stick to the facts, to find the truth, and to form our judgments from the truth.

I have called the account of the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands fair and reasonable. I think we all need to endeavour to work hard to be fair and reasonable. The political process does not always encourage these qualities, and today, I hope the temperature will go down a bit. We all need to focus on the work that needs to be done, the work we need to do as lawmakers.

We need to work together. We have so much work that needs to be done. On two occasions yesterday, the government asked for unanimous consent to pass the motion to have this matter dealt with by the appropriate committee of the House, that being PROC, the procedure and House affairs committee. Twice that consent was not given.

• (1215)

The outrage shown by the opposition, both real and enhanced, has led us to where we are now. I cannot see what other action the Prime Minister can take to put this matter to rest.

The House must continue to do the work that we are elected to do. I hope that we can move past this unfortunate incident with assurance that such actions will never ever happen again. Tensions have undoubtedly been running very high. With the stress of meeting the Supreme Court's tight timeline on a vitally important piece of legislation at this time of year, things have been getting intense. I again say that we all need to take a breath and let cooler heads prevail. Let us keep our focus on doing the public's work for the public good. That is what Canadians expect of us.

It is a special honour and responsibility for all of us to be here. We must move forward. The apology has been made. Let us get the work done.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to most of those comments while eating my lunch, and then I came back in here because I felt it was very important that we actually discuss this.

First, the member quoted many members of Parliament, but she did not actually quote the member for Berthier—Maskinongé.

Yesterday, I was sitting in this House and I said to my friend from New Brunswick Southwest, who is a member of the government, that I had to leave and take an adult timeout. I am a 45-year-old woman, similar in age to the Prime Minister. As an adult, I recognized that I was losing my cool, that I was not happy with the way things were going in the House. Therefore, I took a stance, removed myself from the House, had a breath of fresh air, and came back in.

Privilege

I did watch what the Prime Minister did yesterday. Actually he and I had some words. Because I feel I can communicate with many members, I said to him that I saw the anger. That is something we have to look at. He is the leader of our country. He needs to be the leader of all Canadians. What I saw last night on Twitter was absolutely disgusting. I saw that the NDP member who had been hit—yes, by accident; I do agree it was an accident—was not just victimized about being hit, but her integrity was totally thrown overboard. No one really cared. They were saying that she was a drama queen, and this and that. That is not what this is about. Although I have great respect for the member for Hull—Aylmer, with respect to his comments about this being a soccer match, yes, it was a soccer match, and our Prime Minister should have been given a red card. His actions were out of line.

When I am not a member of Parliament, I am a mother of five children. I, too, have had to learn to take an adult timeout. The Prime Minister felt that he needed to go over there and say, “We need to do this”. He is not the king of the castle. We are members of Parliament and we need to all work together. If I as the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London recognized that things were getting out of hand, why could he not sit back, allow things to take place, and act as an adult, rather than interfering in something that he had no business interfering which resulted in where we are today? We can talk about wanting to talk about Bill C-14, because we all do, but unfortunately because of what happened we cannot, and those actions must be discussed.

• (1220)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I really have to agree that much needs to be changed in this House when it comes to decorum.

I am a member of PROC, the procedure and House affairs committee. As a new member of Parliament, and as a social worker who is not used to working in such an adversarial environment, as my first experience here, I have to say that I was shocked. I even brought it up at PROC. A lot of work needs to be done by all parliamentarians.

I would also say that I have to hand it to our Prime Minister for speaking up right away and apologizing for his actions. He is making no excuse for what happened yesterday and also today. I have to respect him for that. He is taking full responsibility for exactly what has happened.

With respect to the decorum in the House, I believe that we all have a role to play here. When we are speaking, it would be very good if members would not speak over one another. Again, as a new parliamentarian, perhaps if we are a bit objective when we get here we can give some positive feedback. I would encourage all members of this House to sit down and let us work together, because I think that we all want to get the job done.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the Prime Minister's apology this morning. If he had made that apology last night, it would have de-escalated things a lot.

I am dismayed to hear the member now revisit and reopen things, and try to justify and qualify what was said. We have had a significant setback by virtue of the member's intervention just now. I

am very discouraged to hear her referencing the comments from the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, who could not sit further away, in the sixth row. Why would those comments be highlighted?

Again, this morning we have had an apology with no qualifications and no attempt by the Prime Minister to justify any of his actions. That was classy. Last night was not, by anybody on the other side.

I ask the member, were the comments she made on behalf of her party and her government? If they are, this is a serious setback to what we heard from the Prime Minister this morning.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, not at all.

First and foremost, we have to recognize that if PROC is going to be looking at this issue, we really have to make sure that we collect all of the information on what occurred yesterday. The role of PROC is really to be the collector of facts, and that is really what the role is going to be.

It is important to make sure that we have a clear picture of what happened yesterday. I am in no way trying to justify the actions that happened here yesterday by all of the members who were involved, actually.

Our Prime Minister was very quick to give his apology, his sincere apology, yesterday and again today. If he can do anything to make the situation better for the member involved, he truly wants to do that.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in her speech, my hon. colleague from Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe spoke about her experience as a social worker and said that she had witnessed similar situations.

Yesterday, my colleague from Ontario, our whip, the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, was grabbed, bullied, and subjected to verbal and physical violence and bullying. Ultimately, this is our workplace.

Since my colleague has experience in this field, could she tell us what kind of disciplinary action or consequences someone would face for committing such an act in a workplace? I would like to know whether there are any therapies or programs. Normally, what kind of measures would be taken in a workplace in similar circumstances?

• (1225)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his question.

In the past, I saw people who had been victims of workplace situations or incidents that were not appropriate.

However, the first thing that happened was that our Prime Minister admitted to making a mistake. In many cases, when one wants to repair a relationship, that is the first step. The mistake must be not only admitted to, but admitted to sincerely. The Prime Minister wants to ensure that the people who were affected know that what he said was very sincere.

*Privilege**[English]*

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to put the same question to the hon. member who just spoke that I put to the Prime Minister. I was very disappointed that he did not respond.

The hon. member just spoke of the importance of decorum in this House. We all understand that what we saw last night went beyond the definition of decorum. It was essentially seen as an assault, not necessarily an assault on my colleague but certainly an assault on the Conservative Party whip.

What troubles me is the member seems to be suggesting that if we returned to a sense of decorum in the House, everything would be fine and we would all be the same. I will put the question to her that I put to the Prime Minister which he refused to respond.

There have been a lot of problems in this place this week because of the actions taken by her government, such as Motion No. 6 which would take away all of our rights and privileges to participate reasonably and properly in this House to represent our constituents.

Will the member speak to that matter? It is very important that that be one of the matters addressed if we are going to move forward and work collaboratively on good legislation on behalf of Canadians.

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor: Mr. Speaker, first and foremost, we all have a responsibility as parliamentarians to work collaboratively to make sure that we influence good public policy, and that we bring laws forward.

At this point in time, our government has a very tight agenda, and a lot of bills need to be passed. We have to work to ensure that that work is done. That is truly what Canadians expect of us.

[Translation]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

Before I comment on the matter before us this morning, I would like to make a comparison with the discussions we had about Bill C-14.

The discussion started off well enough. I am very happy to have been a member of the Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying, where the quality of the debate was very mature. I really enjoyed collaborating with my Liberal and Conservative colleagues on our committee's work. We were all motivated by a desire to work together to get the best results for the people we represent. Even though we did not always agree, our discussions were always respectful.

Our life experiences make us who we are today. Personally, regardless of the situation, I always pay attention to the people around me. Someone just said that, when emotions are running high, our actions may be out of character. No. When my emotions are running high, I am always respectful of the people around me.

I was therefore saying that the Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying managed to discuss the issue respectfully. Last week, I attended the first meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to examine Bill C-14 clause by clause. I

think that may have been the beginning of what we saw yesterday. I did not get the impression that the Liberal members who were at that meeting were open to discussion.

My life experience has taught me that discussion and debate yield better results. I did not get the impression that the members at that meeting were open to debate. The members were there, but some of them did not even seem to be interested in the discussion. They were just there to obey the order they had received to vote against any amendments proposed by the opposition.

This week, time allocation motions were moved, motions that would prevent members from speaking in the House. One Liberal colleague made an interesting analogy. When I asked him why he could not have a discussion about Bill C-14, he told me that even he had tried, but it is as though the government is caught in a rushing stream moving toward the deadline, toward its goal, and going against the government right now is like trying to swim against the current at Niagara Falls.

When a government adopts the attitude of wanting to achieve a certain goal at all costs, it will run roughshod over anything standing in its way. In my life, there is something that I refuse to ever accept and that is the excuse that the end justifies the means. That should be unacceptable. I think that we were all able to see the result of that attitude yesterday.

We really need to ensure that our debates in the House are respectful. That is the only way that we will be able to honour the privilege that we have been given of being here to represent our constituents.

In her speech, I heard my Liberal colleague trivialize yesterday's behaviour, and we saw that attitude yesterday as well.

● (1230)

When someone witnesses an act of violence or intimidation and thinks that the victim is partially responsible, that should raise a red flag. That line of reasoning is wrong. Under no circumstances is a victim of an act of violence or intimidation ever responsible for that act.

Some Liberal members are trivializing what happened, saying that he is a good person. I too am a good person and I am never disrespectful towards anyone. I would never do anything that might hurt anyone around me. If genuine respect guides us in all our actions and in all situations, we can ensure that we will always be considerate of those around us.

In his apology this morning, the Prime Minister said that he did not pay attention to his surroundings. When the committee examines this matter, it will have to decide what the consequences should be, and then we will all know what consequences we can expect if we do not pay attention to our surroundings in the House. That is crucial.

Privilege

What is more, people keep talking about bringing decorum back to this House. Unfortunately, since this government came to power, there has been plenty of lip service, but very little in the way of real measures. If it really wants to bring back decorum, the government should start by withdrawing Motion No. 6, which muzzles the opposition and limits our rights as parliamentarians. That would be far more meaningful as a concrete gesture than any empty rhetoric the Liberals could spew here today.

Some concrete action needs to come from this debate, and we must leave room for discussion. This morning the Minister of Health said that she hoped we would make a wise decision regarding Bill C-14. In order to do so, parliamentarians must be allowed to continue the discussion and debate.

Yesterday's incident occurred when the government was trying to curtail debate. It is the attitude that we saw this week that led to yesterday's actions. After the Prime Minister's apology, some Liberal MPs rose in the House to make light of the situation.

In the House, we must not make light of acts of violence and bullying. Yesterday, when I compared what happened to other acts of violence, that is exactly what I wanted to convey. We must not make light of acts of violence and bullying, no matter where they are committed. This belief must be very clear in everything that is said in the House.

We have the privilege of representing citizens. Consequently, we must rise above what we witnessed yesterday. Since yesterday, I have heard people say that we have to put things into context. The context and the facts are very clear, though, and we must not try to make light of them. It is important that there be very clear consequences for yesterday's actions. The best thing that the government could do about this incident is withdraw Motion No. 6.

● (1235)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I salute my colleague from Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot. We both served on the Special Joint Committee on Physician-Assisted Dying. It went very well. The proceedings were cordial, warm, and respectful, even though, at the end of the day, we all have different points of view. That is democracy. That is how parliamentary business works.

I have a lot of respect for my colleague, even though we disagree on about 95%, or even 100%, of social and economic issues. That is democracy. That is what we must protect. I have a very simple question for my colleague. Yesterday, at around 7 p.m., she made a statement comparing yesterday's events and violence against women, which garnered a strong reaction in Quebec.

The member has special expertise on this issue, having worked in shelters for women who are victims of violence. I would like the member to clarify her perspective, since we must admit that yesterday, in Quebec, and even on the Radio-Canada evening news, some people felt that this type of comparison was a bit of a stretch. I want to give the member the opportunity to explain her thinking.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Indeed, taken out of context, my words could have meant a lot of things. The key word in his question is “parallel” because yesterday I was indeed drawing a parallel. From my experience working on

domestic abuse cases, often in these situations friends of the guilty party tend to downplay the situation, saying that the victim asked for it. That is the parallel that sprang to mind when I heard colleagues saying that she should not have been there, she should not have been in the middle of the room, as if she were responsible for what happened to her. That was the parallel I was trying to make.

Likewise, when a child is bullied in the schoolyard, it is not right to ask what he did to provoke the bullying. The bully is responsible for what happened, not the person who was bullied or assaulted. That is the parallel I wanted to draw yesterday. I hope I answered my colleague's question.

● (1240)

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest and respect to my colleague.

In my 12 years, I have learned some things about this institution. Parliament may seem to be a very strong institution going back centuries, but it is also a very fragile institution. At the end of the day, it is based on the principle of the fundamental goodwill of the members to work together.

What we have seen here over this past week is a disintegration of a way of working together, which led to the unfortunate event of last night. What we need to look at is how we got there. The fact was that it was the Prime Minister who became upset at that moment, but it could have been any member. I am not going to excuse his behaviour, but we have to go back to the disintegration of what is happening in this House and talk honestly about how to go forward.

When we go to these tit-for-tat procedural wars, the fundamental trust breaks down and people end up doing things that they regret. We have to be with one another in the coming four years, and it will be tense at times, but the government does have a majority. It does have the power to get its mandate through, which is the will and the mandate that the people of Canada gave the Liberals. However, the people of Canada also gave us as parliamentarians our obligations.

It would be, for me, a very good sign of de-escalating to remove Motion No. 6. The idea that in Parliament a minister could arbitrarily end debate by saying it is over means that we as opposition members would be acting as visitors in our House. That the government could suspend for the summer simply by saying we are suspending for the summer is a breach of rules that we have never had.

I would ask my colleagues on the other side, and ask the member, what she thinks about this. We need to bring ourselves back to a place where we can restore the respect we need to show the Canadian people by working together. We have to find a way through this, and I prefer to do this now, so we can end this and find a way to show this House the dignity that it needs to have.

Privilege

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, I got into politics to try to help make people less cynical about politics. I believe that what happened yesterday only made people more cynical.

As I said from the outset, I was lucky because the first parliamentary committee I sat on is a committee where we were able to work together respectfully and we achieved the best possible result following our exchanges.

I sincerely hope that the government stops trying to get its way by all means possible. The end does not justify the means.

[*English*]

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I continue to feel unsettled about what happened in this chamber last night. I think many of us are feeling the same way. The Prime Minister's actions were disappointing; they were shocking; they were unprecedented.

Many of us have said it this morning, but again, in no workplace would swearing or grabbing of colleagues, male or female, be allowed. It should not have happened.

I will echo my colleague's comments. Cynicism about senior governments and cynicism about this place is a big problem in this country, and it affects the work we do here. The government was elected on such a message of hope and change and optimism after, frankly, a dark decade with the Conservative government—I will say that again—and that hope and change is betrayed by the actions that have happened, particularly this week, in this House.

We had a very strong message from voters to work together, and we saw that on Tuesday, when my colleague from Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke stood together with the Minister of Justice. To have her take entirely the bill on transgender rights that he has worked on for so many years, to have that co-operation across the aisle, to have them stand together was a very beautiful and very powerful and respectful moment, very respectful of my NDP colleague's work. I am thankful to the Minister of Justice for doing that. That is an example of where we can work together, work co-operatively and set a different tone.

The profile of feminism that the government has set has been noticed around the world. Now every country is having the same conversation. We have a unique opportunity in the world right now to truly bring gender equality and to bring gender into all our conversations, and I commend the government for setting that tone.

Why then would we dial that back this week? We also had a great example of tone in this House around our debates until midnight, those of us who sat together until midnight, both to talk so powerfully and sorrowfully about the tragedy of suicide in Attawapiskat and then a couple of weeks later to talk about physician-assisted dying, a very emotional, very personal discussion, and to have members of all parties speak from the heart on this and have us speak together. That is the kind of work we should be doing together.

To contrast that to yesterday, to see the Prime Minister intervene in a way that was completely outside his job description, completely inappropriate and completely rattling of all of us, to see grabbing and

swearing, was shocking to all of us. It feels like bullying, I have to say. We have seen the government shut down debate on five of its 15 bills. It did not need to do that. It has a majority. It will get its way at the end of the day. Why would it invoke closure and stifle debate in this House?

Why would the government have pushed past the very powerful advice that its committee on physician-assisted dying gave? Why would it not have reflected the advice of that all-party partial consensus in its legislation? It just feels like a disregard. Why would the government take a majority on its democratic reform committee? It has a majority in the House; why not take these opportunities to work together, as my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley proposed, to have the committee designed in a different and innovative way? It did not take those opportunities.

More than anything, we were elected to give voice to our voters and voice to our ridings, and the actions this week and what feels to me like bullying are impeding that. I have been waiting four days to give a speech about physician-assisted dying. Every time I have come to work ready to give that speech, the government has been throwing spanners in the works all week.

The Liberals then asked us to debate, all of a sudden with no notice, the immigration bill. We have not talked about that for weeks. Then all of a sudden we were talking about RCMP collective bargaining. Then there was a copyright bill that we had not debated at all. We were kind of jumping around all over the map. There was so much consensus in the House that we moved through the copyright bill very quickly, but again, why make us jump all over the map when the true emergency is the bill on physician-assisted dying. It is very discouraging.

• (1245)

We should remember that what we were voting on last night was a motion that the government moved to invoke closure on debate around the physician-assisted dying legislation, very heated and passionate. Why would the Liberals stifle debate on this? It was in that atmosphere that the Prime Minister charged across the aisle when he did not need to and came into physical contact with two members on this side of the House.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, PROC, is going to look at this issue. I am concerned, given that the government has a majority on that committee, that it might bully its way there also. I would love to hear members on the other side reassure me on that point.

There is another bullying motion, Motion No. 6, which was announced yesterday morning, an unprecedented straitjacket on the work of the opposition and an unprecedented stifling of the ability of members of Parliament, elected democratically in their ridings, to give voice to their constituents' concerns. It is extremely troubling.

It is clear that high tensions yesterday affected everybody in the House, but the government imposed those tensions, both by shutting down debate on five out of 15 pieces of legislation that have been in the House already and by proposing Motion No. 6 to hamper the opposition. The government chose to do that and the Prime Minister chose to leave his seat and get physically entangled with members on the other side. That was his decision.

I do appreciate his apology this morning. If he had given that unqualified apology last night, it would have gone a lot further. It was important for him to have said it immediately. I am glad that, 15 hours later, he said to us in the House.

I encourage the government to back down from its strong-arming of this legislation. It should allow us to do our work, to represent our voters and our ridings, and to speak true voice to all the important issues before the House. The government should recommit to a workplace in which swearing and grabbing are never allowed and nobody ever tries to justify it; they say it is not allowed. The government should also abandon Motion No. 6. The House has to be able to do its work.

New Democrats believe in working together with all parties to get things done and improving the tone in the House. However, the Liberals need to take leadership to make this happen, and they lost a lot of ground last night. Canadians have a right to expect decorum in the House, to expect workplace safety, and to expect better things in Parliament than what they saw yesterday; and New Democrats are determined to work with all parties to make that happen.

• (1250)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is troubling me is the number of tweets being sent out by the public, which seem to be undermining even the heartfelt apology by the Prime Minister, who has admitted that his behaviour was untoward in this place and against the recognized rules of the House.

There are two really important things on which there is unanimity today. One is that Prime Minister acted in an untoward way, and he has apologized for that. The second is that we need unanimity on the fact that we need to have the rights and privileges of all members in this place. I do not think we can move forward until we go in that direction.

I do not know what kind of message the members on the other side are sending out to the public. I do not expect that they should take any responsibility for what people tweet, but we need to be unanimous in saying we would like proper behaviour to return to this place. It is very important that we work in a cordial and reasonable way, even if we disagree.

None of us should send the message that we do not accept the apology the Prime Minister gave. He agrees his behaviour was wrong and he has sincerely apologized. I am starting to feel uncomfortable that not all members agree and maybe have not accepted the Prime Minister's apology. My colleagues have accepted the apology.

I wonder if my colleague could speak about these two actions that need to occur so that we can move forward and work on the important work of this place.

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Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, what I think we often see in social media, and just in conversations around the country, is an attempt to justify what is unjustifiable. This happens in domestic violence all the time.

I am not saying that what happened on the floor yesterday was domestic violence. I am not saying that at all. I want to be really clear on that.

However, when we do see people weighing in, trying to justify the unjustifiable, that is a sign to me that we have a lot of work to do in our country about workplace violence, about violence in our lives generally. That is why I am so proud that our status of women committee has violence against young women and girls as a high priority. A number of members of the House are part of that committee. It is why I am so pleased that New Democrats have led on a commitment, working with non-governmental organizations and the labour movement, to establish a national violence against women strategy. I am very glad to see the government has a commitment to that, also. It especially says why it is so important for the leaders in this House, and the Prime Minister more than anybody, to set the tone and to never let there be any room to blame victims of violence in any form.

• (1255)

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her gracious and generous words, and also my other colleague. I guess I do see this slightly differently. Since the Liberals are so interested in talking about facts, we should probably review what happened. It was not accidental, or magical, or unintentional that the Prime Minister ended up going from his seat to over here in this corner, then grabbed our whip, frog-marched him down the aisle four or five seats, and in his anger, elbowed the NDP member and knocked her into the desk and did not notice that happened because he was so angry. That is actually the fact. There was no debate going on. It was not heated. It was not emotional. That was a choice that he made to end up over there and cause that act.

What is concerning is that, in his words last night and today, and in the words from some other members, there is an effort to rationalize, to excuse, and to diminish what occurred and to act as if it just sort of happened magically and unintentionally. I think that is very troubling. Many of his comments and those from other members have devolved into a lecture on the behaviour and the decorum of the rest of us. They are trying to turn this into a collective issue, but only one person is actually responsible and accountable for what happened.

I wonder if my hon. colleague might comment on the gap between words and actions, and when people make an apology, whether or not they need to make amends, whether or not there should be consequences, and whether or not action actually shows they are sorry.

Privilege

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the member's observations. She is quite right. What happened in the House last night was 100% because of the actions of the Prime Minister. He chose to stride across the aisle; he chose to swear at members across the aisle; he chose to grab and intervene physically. There is no excuse for that. I am very interested to see what actions the Prime Minister will take to go beyond simply "I'm sorry", because what happened was inexcusable.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will start by saying that I will be sharing my time with the member for Portage—Lisgar.

This is not one of the times that I really would love to get up and debate in the House. After last night, I think all Canadians, when they watch the behaviour that was witnessed last night, realize that this is about our institution. This is about our highest level of government. We heard words like "shocked", "unacceptable", "traumatic", "overwhelmingly violated". These are some of the words that my hon. colleagues here in the House have used to describe the physical event that took place yesterday in the chamber. I am joining all members in the House in the shock and indignation over the actions of the Prime Minister.

I think all of us would prefer to get on to debating other things, but how does the Prime Minister fix this?

As my colleagues have said in the House, this did not just happen. If we look at this week, it started out as a normal week. I know for those of us in the opposition, what we did is something that all Canadians do. We showed up for work on Monday morning, and unfortunately, not enough Liberal members showed up for work, and they almost lost a vote. It is the first time in Canadian history that the Speaker had to break a tie in a situation like this, and they got mad at us for that.

This is something that all Canadians do. They wake up in the morning and they show up for work. That is what Canadians expect us to do. The fact that the Prime Minister was not able to manage a vote through the House, that his House leader was unable to get the votes here required to pass a bill, is not something that is our fault.

What else did we see this week?

There was Motion No. 6, and I think all of us, after that vote, realized that there is a new team in town governing things, but we never thought that it would go as far as Motion No. 6, taking away all the tools that we in the opposition have to effectively oppose.

I have to say to those members on the other side that I have been in opposition and I have been on the government side, and it is our job to oppose. It gives good government. We are opponents; we are not enemies.

The actions of the Prime Minister and his House leader this week kind of set the stage. I think all members of the House would agree. I have been here for 12 years and I have never seen behaviour like this. The behaviour we have seen is totally unacceptable.

The Prime Minister has admitted to coming into physical contact with a number of members. What are the consequences?

We heard today that the Prime Minister is okay that it is being sent to committee, but we all know who has the majority of that committee. I was hoping to hear from the members across the way that, perhaps for this committee, we could agree that maybe the opposition would even have the majority, or at least have some equality there so that we can look at this issue in a reasonable way. However, the government has proven from its actions this week that those members are willing to do anything to drive their agenda forward.

As I said, why I am so disturbed is that I have been here 12 years and I have never seen anything like that before. For me, it is about the love for this institution.

I think everybody would agree that it is completely unacceptable for the Prime Minister to be coming into physical contact with any member of the House without their consent. If the Prime Minister cannot really see that, he clearly does not understand his role in Parliament and how his actions are affecting the functioning of the House.

As I said, I have grown to love this institution. My constituents ask me what it is like being a member of Parliament. I wake up and I sometimes have to pinch myself, because this is a privilege.

● (1300)

I am sorry if I am getting emotional, but this is. I pinch myself. I look around at the beautiful works of art we have here. We have the ability to debate with colleagues who are such outstanding individuals here in the House. Some of the best people I have ever met I have met here in the House, not only from our side but on the opposition side as well.

How have last night's actions affected this institution that all of us love? I am talking about you, Mr. Speaker. What is the role of the Speaker in the House when you come across behaviour like this? What is the Speaker supposed to do? We trust in the Speaker's judgment, and it is a difficult position that the Prime Minister has now put the Speaker of the House in, this House that we feel so wonderful about and respect. What position is the Prime Minister putting the Speaker in? What position is he putting our Sergeant-at-Arms in?

We have this institution that has evolved over centuries, this institution that we have all become part of, like a family. Our role here is to work together to get things done. Part of that is allowing the opposition to do its job, to oppose. This week, sadly, we have seen the government do everything possible, unprecedented, so that, as my colleague said earlier, it does not have an opposition, it has an audience. That is truly sad. We are not enemies; we are opponents.

How does the Prime Minister fix this?

On the other side, we have seen, as my colleague said earlier, the rationalization of the behaviour. It is about taking responsibility for that behaviour and moving along. Yes, the Prime Minister did apologize, and I want the Speaker and all colleagues to know that I do accept that apology, but I want to say past actions are the best predictor of future actions.

I remember in the House, I was sitting right over here and the Prime Minister, at the time, was sitting right back there. My colleague from Thornhill, the Minister of the Environment at that time, one of the most regarded journalists we have ever had in Canada, one of the most respectful speakers here, one of the best speakers I have ever heard, was called something by the Prime Minister, something I cannot repeat here in the House. The Prime Minister did apologize for that. It was a heartfelt apology.

However, I have an article from the *Toronto Star*, from a couple days later, by Susan Delacourt. When the Prime Minister was asked about that apology, he said:

I called him something that was fundamentally biodegradable, compostable and good for the environment.

Is that a heartfelt apology?

For me, as I said, past actions are some of the best predictors of future behaviour. It is incumbent upon all of us, with our love for this institution and showing an example to future generations, to make sure that this institution is not damaged by the actions of the Prime Minister.

How does he do that? I again say, what does the Prime Minister do to fix this? It is about consequences. I have not really seen what is going to happen. I have not seen, from my colleagues across the way, how they would hold their leader, in the highest office in this country, to account for his actions.

We hear that he is okay with this being sent to committee, but we all know the Liberals have the majority on the committee. I do not know. I do not have a crystal ball. Maybe we can figure it out. If the Liberals' actions this week in the House, such as Motion No. 6, are any indication of future action, I think we can probably use that crystal ball and figure out how this is going to affect us and this institution.

I would love to talk a little more on this, because I want my colleagues to know that I am one of those guys who have been up to speak in the House on the assisted suicide bill, twice. My constituents really want their voices to be heard. I have a doctor in my community, Dr. Gillian Gilchrist, who has had years in the palliative care field. I want to bring her comments to the House.

However, I have been denied that right. It has been changed twice. I am hopeful that when the Prime Minister said he was willing to change that he truly is willing to change, and that the actions moving forward will be different. I welcome his apology and I hope that bodes well for his future behaviour.

● (1305)

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's tone and the way he conducts himself as an hon. member. I do not want to go over what happened yesterday. It happened right here in front of me. We saw what happened. We have talked about what happened, but I want to talk about Motion No. 6 in regard to what we are discussing today.

We have what we call Standing Orders, which are here to protect parliamentarians. They are here to protect democracy within Parliament. The government in a tit-for-tat felt it almost lost a vote, so it came in with Motion No. 6. The motion starts this way, "That,

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notwithstanding any Standing Order" in other words, those things that protect Parliament, the rules of Parliament. Then it lists 17 things, (a) to (q), that would take away the power of the opposition to hold the government to account.

The Minister of Health said here today that they are here to advance the issues of Canadians, so is the opposition. However, the government has said it knows what is best so it will handcuff the opposition and ramrod through what it thinks the issues of Canadians are.

The first thing the Liberals said is that "on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, the House shall continue to sit beyond the ordinary hour of daily adjournment until such time as a Minister of the Crown or a Parliamentary Secretary moves a motion for the adjournment of the House". In other words, we just stay and debate until the Liberals decide, and they will not tell us when. Then at two or three o'clock in the morning, they can simply say that now we are going to go to another debate and the opposition had better get its speakers ready at three or four o'clock in the morning.

That is the kind of government we have here. It is trying to take away all of our powers. Could the member who just spoke stand and tell us how Motion No. 6 is taking away from the decorum in the House, or is it adding to decorum in the House? Is it poking the opposition, poking Parliament, and poking Canadians in the eye as far as us being able to hold the government to account?

● (1310)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, sadly, all those things are true, but I would like to point out that Motion No. 6 is actually removing from Canadians the right to hear their members of Parliament debate the important issues before the House. I have been here long enough and I can count. The reality is that the Liberals have the numbers and they will get anything they want through the House. All we are asking on this side is to allow us to have the tools that have evolved. As I said, we belong to an institution that is hundreds of years old and it has worked. It is one of the best systems in the world and its longevity proves that.

I wholly respect my colleague from Battle River—Crowfoot who is one of the longest sitting MPs. Motion No. 6 is about taking away, as my colleague said, Canadians' rights to hear from their members of Parliament and those of us who love this institution. I am asking my colleagues on the other side to please talk to their leader and ask him for a change of heart because Canadians deserve to be heard in the House. They deserve their opinions to be heard and they deserve to hear from their members of Parliament.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today, also not happy about the motion and what I have to speak to. I never anticipated that I would see what I saw yesterday here in our chamber right in front of my eyes. I never imagined that I would be speaking to something like this, but it is where we find ourselves. I want to speak to this motion and talk about a couple of things.

Privilege

I want to talk about what happened on a human level, in terms of one human being to another human being and the kind of effect it has on all of us, and the kind of example that it sets for all Canadians: for young people who are watching, for children, and for people who are aspiring to this job. I want to talk a bit about that, and then I want to talk about the ramifications as far as what we have seen happening over the last number of weeks with the government asserting itself over the opposition.

Yesterday, we saw somebody lose his temper. I imagine that frustration and anger has probably been building up, and maybe some of it is tied to things we do not even know about. Sometimes in life that happens. We go to work and things have been pressing at us and there are things going on. Our co-workers are kind of annoying us and doing things that we wish they would not do. We get angry and frustrated. What is acceptable in the workplace is to speak to that individual. However, it would have even been unusual had the Prime Minister walked over and spoken to our chief opposition whip. What was not and is not acceptable in the workplace is for that temper outburst to then translate into physically touching and pushing around the person that one is angry at. That is not acceptable.

If a friend of mine had said that she or he had just been elbowed in the chest by a co-worker or CEO because of being angry at another co-worker and trying to push that co-worker somewhere, that would have been a huge workplace incident. I see our Prime Minister definitely as a CEO, as he is in charge of our country, but I do consider him a co-worker in this place. We are all equal in this House. We all are equal, in as far as we are all elected, so I would say that the Prime Minister is my co-worker. With a CEO or co-worker, it would never be acceptable for that kind of action to take place.

With that co-worker who lost his or her temper and came charging over and elbowed people, and all of the things that took place, even if that person said they were sorry, there would be consequences. There would be actions to ensure it did not happen again. There would be some discussion about why it happened, why the individual is frustrated with his or her job, whether there are other things going on, and how the individual would get help so as not to do that again.

In my experience, I used to work with children in schools. I have seen teachers. My sister was a nurse. I have seen a lot of work situations, and I have seen people get angry, upset, or frustrated. However, it is rare to see a physical outburst, and rare to see people physically laying their hands on another person. That is concerning for me.

I will be blunt. That the Prime Minister felt that he lost it that much that he would charge over and do what he did in this place, being so public, with cameras and all of us around, the very men and women he is leading, concerns me regarding his judgment and his state of mind at that time. That is one piece of this that I do not think we should ignore.

I hope nobody on the other side is laughing. I saw some of them cheering when he charged over here.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that it was a choice that the Prime Minister made. It was not an accident. An accident is when I am walking down the hall and I trip, and in tripping I accidentally bump

into someone else. That is an accident. If I charge across the hallway in anger, elbowing my way, it is not an accident; it is a choice. The Prime Minister made a choice. He made a choice in this House of Commons, and there have to be consequences. He needs to do something about his anger. Let us call a spade a spade. He has anger issues, and he needs to figure out how to control them.

● (1315)

I am going to mention this very quickly. In the last Parliament, there were two individuals who were accused of harassing other members of Parliament. The two who were accused were part of the Liberal Party. At the time, the now Prime Minister was then the leader of the Liberal Party. He was the judge, jury and sentencer, and he immediately got rid of those two Liberal MPs. Their careers were destroyed and they are absolutely finished. I believe it was a different set of actions. We do not even know what actually happened in those cases. I would say that this also has to be taken into consideration. Let us hope that there is not one standard for certain MPs and another for the Prime Minister.

This also has absolutely nothing to do with the tone in the House of Commons, or what the NDP might have been doing yesterday or in the days before. This is not about the Conservatives. This is not about us in any way. It is about one thing: the choices that the Prime Minister made yesterday.

The Prime Minister apologized and said that he wants to make amends. One of the first things he could do in this House to bring back respect and civility, and to try to mend what he did, is to instruct his cabinet ministers to withdraw Motion No. 6.

My colleagues and I have talked about how the week started. On Monday, the government was embarrassed because it almost lost a vote. Because of that frustration, the government did legislatively what the Prime Minister did yesterday, when he came marching over. Motion No. 6, legislatively, is what the Prime Minister did. The government basically marched over and said to the opposition, "Sit down and shut up." It smacked us down and said, "You stay in your place. In fact, we are taking away your ability to do anything else." If the Prime Minister is serious about making a change and he wants to make amends, he needs to stop using the hammer on the opposition and taking away our tools. He needs to withdraw Motion No. 6. That is important. We have not heard that from him, nor have we heard it from any of the opposition members.

We also have to have some accountability at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. This cannot be a matter of the Prime Minister going to the committee and the Liberals doing what they always do, which is to hurry through whatever they want done.

Privilege

They will have the majority on the procedure and House affairs committee. We are all concerned about that. Therefore, we need to see the Prime Minister take personal responsibility that this was not a mistake or an accident. He has to deal with his anger issues, his temper, and entitlement, or whatever that was. I am not a psychologist, and I am not about to try to define that. He has to withdraw Motion No. 6 in order to bring some civility back to this place. The whole issue with this going to the procedure and House affairs committee is that there will be no credibility to it because of the Liberal majority. The Liberal members will push it through as quickly as they can and hope that it all goes away.

This has to be dealt with on those three levels. I certainly hope that it will be.

• (1320)

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to the concern I have for the disrespect that has been showing up in this House. We sit across from the Prime Minister, and since my first day here, I have seen the arrogance. Other members on this side of the House have witnessed it when the cameras are not on him. He shows respect when the cameras are there. However, once those cameras are off him, the arrogance, the disrespect, and the immature facial expressions and remarks that are shot back across this room are of concern to me.

I am also concerned that I see a history here. Our member for Oshawa talked about the history of what we are seeing. I was witness to part of that history. I come from Salmon Arm. Many of the members in this House may not remember, but in August of 1982, a former prime minister, by chance of the same last name, happened to pass through Salmon Arm. He met with three protesters, who became angry enough that he shot them the bird, the proverbial “Salmon Arm salute”, as it became known across this country. It is that history of disrespect for other members, a disrespect for anyone who has a difference of opinion, that is showing up in the Liberal government again.

I would ask the member for Portage—Lisgar this. She spoke about remedial actions that should be taken. I would like her to elaborate a little further on that. What remedial action does she see for this disrespect that has taking place historically?

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, all of us see things going on in the House. Sometimes we get up and ask a question or answer a question and are indignant, but we talk with each other and we find a way to get along and be collegial. Certainly, though, when we see our Prime Minister sticking out his tongue and doing childish things like that, it is hard to watch. It is hard to see why he would continue to do that.

With regard to respect, I am very disturbed about the disrespect in Motion No. 6. It gives cabinet the ability to shut down debate, make debate go until 3:00 in the morning or end at 3:00 in the morning, whatever cabinet would decide. That is so disrespectful to opposition. We have a job to do. As the Leader of the Opposition said this morning, we are all elected. We are an opposition, but we are very proud of our job and proud of the role we have. We need to have the tools that are afforded to us.

It was disrespectful for the Prime Minister to come across the aisle, figuratively, and do what he did yesterday, which was to slam

us all, in the head really, and tell us we cannot do our jobs, to sit down and shut up. That is disrespectful.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have talked about the apology a number of times. I am sure that the Prime Minister is indeed apologetic for getting caught doing what he did, but an apology should not come from a script. That is what we have seen.

I would like to ask our hon. colleague if she feels that perhaps an apology that is heartfelt should not come from a script, that there are other things our Prime Minister could do to prove that actions speak louder than words.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that question. I am sure the Prime Minister had a pretty rough night. He probably was a bit shook up himself, and perhaps he wanted to ensure that he said everything he wanted to say. Therefore, the fact that he read the apology, I do not doubt that he is very sorry that it happened. However, sorry is not enough in this case. It would not be in the workplace or any other situation. As much as “sorry” is appreciated, it is a first step of a lot of other steps that have to take place.

On a personal level, he needs to figure out why he did that. It was not just an accident; it was a choice. It was a well thought-out choice. He needs to think about that on a personal level and deal with it. This is what he has to answer. Here in the House of Commons, if he wants to have a fresh start and have some credibility in the House, he needs to show that by withdrawing Motion No. 6 and not stopping and ending debate in the way that he has proposed.

• (1325)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to share my time with the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

I am very troubled, like many today who have stood up to speak. What I would really like to do is perhaps set the table a bit on how we found ourselves in this position. I think more than one incident has created this really unfortunate position we are in today.

I would like to start with the election of October. The Liberals were given a strong majority. In part, their message to Canadians was that they represented change, a new voice, and a change in our democratic process. Canadians listened to that, they watched, and in October provided a strong majority for the Liberals.

I want to quote a part of the Speech from the Throne, which was just five months ago. It states:

Canada succeeds in large part because here, diverse perspectives and different opinions are celebrated, not silenced.

Parliament shall be no exception.

In this Parliament, all members will be honoured, respected and heard, wherever they sit. For here, in these chambers, the voices of all Canadians matter.

The Speech from the Throne is a very critical document. It is the road map that the government is providing and sharing with Canadians on what its plans are.

Privilege

The speech also indicated “give Canadians a stronger voice in the House of Commons, the Government will promote more open debate and free votes, and reform and strengthen committees”.

Those are very important commitments.

In every minister's mandate letter, this is included:

I made a personal commitment to bring new leadership and a new tone to Ottawa. We made a commitment to Canadians to pursue our goals with a renewed sense of collaboration.

Again, every minister has that in their mandate letter. It is in the Speech from the Throne. It is the tone that was committed to by the government to be set in the House.

The government is not very old. It is only six months. Of course, we did not sit until January. We had a small sitting in December and then we had a sitting that started in January after Christmas. Perhaps the first month or two, the Liberals lived up to the commitments they made to Canadians. However, starting in the last few weeks, there has been a significant and noticeable change. The hon. opposition leader, the member for Sturgeon River—Parkland, said it best when she said that the Liberals apparently now wanted to have an audience and not an opposition.

We can look at items like democratic reform, which is fundamental. The Liberals do not want all voices heard; they only want their voices to be heard. If we do not agree with them, they will do things like move opposition days to Fridays, which is a very short time and there is not much opportunity to debate.

Everyone in the House recognizes that Bill C-14 is very important legislation, and we need to look at this because it is very important. We returned on Monday, and the understanding was that we would spend most of the day talking about Bill C-14.

I have been in the House for seven years, and I have one of the furthest ridings, which is usually 12 hours door to door. I always make that trip on Sunday night so I am here ready to be present in the House when it opens on Monday.

It is also important to note that the House only sits 26 weeks of the year. There are 26 weeks where members can be in their ridings or cabinet ministers can do some of the important work they have to do outside the House. We know the government wants to get rid of Friday and does not want to show up to work on Monday.

It is very simple math. The government has 184 members, and they need to have 169 in the House on Monday morning. How many were here? There was 139. Even at 169, it means we can still have a few people who are away, or some ministers off doing some of the work they need to do. However, they need to have their people in the House. They were shy of that 169 by 30 members.

• (1330)

The fact the Liberals almost lost the vote is not the responsibility of the opposition; it is the responsibility of the Liberals and their need to show up to work.

Instead of debating Bill C-14, what did we do? With respect to Bill C-14, we hear from the Minister of Health that it has a critical time frame, that it has to get done. Did we debate Bill C-14 on

Monday? No. We debated Bill C-10 all day. Although important legislation, it did not have the criticalness to it that Bill C-14 has.

What did we do Tuesday? We debated Bill C-6, the citizenship act, which is important legislation. All legislation is important, but it was not Bill C-14 with its critical timeline.

Then we went back to the debate on Bill C-10, the Air Canada Public Participation Act. Then we debated Bill C-11, the Copyright Act, again, important legislation.

Essentially, we offered to debate Bill C-14 until midnight for two days, but the Liberals had us debate other legislation instead. More important, not only did they have us debate different pieces of legislation, they failed to even provide a parliamentary calendar. That has never been done in the whole time I have been here. We are given the agenda for the week so we can prepare. The Liberals did not even have the respect to provide a parliamentary calendar. All of a sudden we were debating the Copyright Act. That is a profound disrespect to the opposition and it has never been done in Parliament.

Then we hit yesterday, which was Wednesday. We were again ready to debate Bill C-14, which had important amendments from the committee and we needed to debate them. It is important to debate. Debate matters, especially in this instance. At second reading, I had a profound compliment when one of my colleague's said, “Listening to your words in the debate changed my mind in terms of how I'm going to vote”. We are debating life and death. We are debating amendments. What did the Liberals do? They put closure on the debate, maybe one speech at report stage on something so critical. We could have been spending Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday debating the bill.

On top of that, the Liberals introduced Motion No. 6, which was so aptly described this morning as looking at every possible tool the opposition has and taking it away.

The member for Wellington—Halton Hills said:

The fundamental responsibility mechanism in the House is the confidence convention. The 20 or so members of Parliament who are part of the ministry who are the government sit there because they have the confidence of the majority of members of this chamber. It is that confidence convention that is undermined by the motion that the government has put on the paper.

By giving members of the ministry the unilateral right, at any time, to adjourn the House...

We can certainly see a whole host of measures. Certainly we were debating a closure motion. The NDP delayed things for, I understand, less than a minute when the incident happened where the Prime Minister lost control.

As I head toward the end of my time to speak to this important issue, there are a few things that I would like to see.

First, the Prime Minister's apology was appropriate. He also needs to look into his heart to see what created that anger within him and why he responded to it in such an inappropriate way.

Privilege

More important, I think we all expect him to live up to those standards and commitment he made in the Speech from the Throne to respect all members of the House. This would include removing Motion No. 6.

• (1335)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech on this troubling incident and what we went through in the House yesterday.

I would like her to tell us more about the climate that probably contributed to this incident. The government is not only trying to physically push around members of the House, but it is also trying to push through items on the parliamentary Calendar. I think that this contributed to the incident, since the Prime Minister absolutely wanted us to move forward with the vote and pushed the opposition to speed things up. As always, the government wants to speed up the parliamentary calendar.

The government does not respect the opposition parties and simply does whatever it wants. The Liberals promised a new government and promised to do things differently. Does that mean pushing around opposition members?

Could the member speak to the climate that contributed to this incident and that is the result of the government's attempt to push through items on the parliamentary calendar?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I will go back to the Speech from the Throne, which stated, "Parliament shall be no exception. In this Parliament, all members will be honoured, respected and heard, wherever they sit."

In the last two weeks, we have seen nothing that possibly resembles respecting and honouring all those and all Canadians. What we have seen is a government that is dishonouring those words and its commitment it made to Canadians by doing many things. These many things are absolutely unprecedented in the history of Parliament, whether it is Motion No. 6, or closure on a debate as important as assisted dying. These things do nothing to live up to the standards the government set for itself.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after you spend years in politics, you start to see that cynicism is everywhere. People question whether we are doing good work. Many politicians cannot avoid cynicism in their political life.

Cynicism can sometimes get quite bad, especially in the form of caricatures, even though we never asked for that to happen to us. There have been pictures of the member for Berthier—Maskinongé circulating on social media since yesterday that do not show any semblance of respect for her. The member certainly did not ask for something like this to happen to her. Unfortunately, today, she is suffering the consequences of a completely irresponsible and cavalier act on the part of the Prime Minister.

No one can predict the indirect consequences of this act, as is evident today, given the completely inappropriate things on social media. Once again, she did not ask for this.

Can my colleague talk about what kind of consequences she has seen in the current political debate in Canada?

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I have heard from some of the NDP members that the member is being exposed to some very vicious, ruthless comments on Twitter. She is the innocent in this event. The things she is having to deal with as a result of the Prime Minister's actions are absolutely unacceptable. That is certainly important.

The other important thing to recognize is that this type of behaviour, in any other workplace, would be absolutely unacceptable and there would be significant and severe consequences. Whether one is in health care, or a teacher, regardless of one's background, there are significant and important consequences when someone clearly loses control in such a way and creates some very difficult consequences.

• (1340)

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to say that until today, every time I stand in the House, it has been an honour to talk about bills or a matter that moves this country and my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex forward.

For 20 years, I was involved in municipal government. I started out in planning, became a councillor, and then reeve and mayor for many of those years. Then I had the distinct pleasure and most distinguished honour of being elected to this place to represent the constituents of my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex. I have done so for a little over 10 years now, which I guess says a bit about how old I am. However, I can say that in that time and in my career as a business person, I have never in my life even attempted to visualize the abuse of an institution that we saw yesterday, not by a member of Parliament but by the distinguished head, the Prime Minister, of what I call this great country of Canada.

Every one of us will stand and say what a privilege it is to be here, and it is. I take every one at his or her word. Yesterday, I saw the Prime Minister get up out of his seat for some reason and storm across the aisle. I also watched the video clips last night and I have to say the clips did not show the anger in his face. I have absolutely no idea why a Prime Minister would get angry just because people had not yet taken their seats for a vote on cutting off the time for debate. However, he did. He stormed across the aisle, grabbed the Conservative whip, and dragged him away. Then something must have occurred, because the Prime Minister went back.

Privilege

Not only did he abuse his authority, not only did he grab the Conservative whip and pull him away, but he went back and used coarse language in the House, which is not acceptable. Nobody on the other side seems to want to talk about it. I have listened to two members across the aisle today who actually tried to minimize what the Prime Minister, their leader, did. It will not get minimized and it will not go away until he does something to make sure there are consequences for what he did not only to our NDP colleague but to the members of the House and to regain the respect of Canadians across the country which was lost yesterday.

I am trying to figure it out. He was like an angry, spoiled adolescent who did not get his way, so he got up and went across the aisle. He instantly apologized. He made the apology not after the first time he crossed the aisle, not after he crossed the aisle the second time, but he made it after the House erupted and he maybe figured out that he had better say something. Then this morning, in a written statement, and my colleague from Portage—Lisgar said, “I understand, not likely a great night,” we have a written apology.

● (1345)

We learn from history. We learn from apologies. He is a great orator. He is a drama teacher. That is his background. He is a good actor.

When a member stands up in this place, we have to take the member at his word. In 2012, the Prime Minister, then a member of Parliament, made a comment to a colleague of mine. I was in the House. He used unparliamentary language. He hurled a comment at our environment minister. We were in government at the time. He said, “Oh, you piece of” and I cannot say the word in this House, but he did. Our Prime Minister, unapologetic about the spirit that moved him, said, “I called him something that was fundamentally biodegradable, compostable and good for the environment.”

Now our colleagues across the way are on their knees saying, “Oh, please, take him at his word. What he said was compassionate and he meant it.” In families and in business, and with people I deal with every day, I take people at their word when they follow their word. I do not take people at their word because they are good speakers, good orators, or a drama teacher before becoming the Prime Minister.

He has brought the House to the point where we have no trust in the government. The government almost lost a vote on Monday, and for almost the first time in the history of Canada, it took the Speaker to break the vote, because people did not show up for work.

We got elected to show up for work. I guess the government was embarrassed because it could not get its members here, so the government drafted Motion No. 6. First of all, the government took away the calendar. What does that mean to the folks who are listening? It means the government can bring bills forward and we will have no time to prepare to debate them. It took away the calendar that indicates which bill is going to be on the docket, and we would have no time to prepare for it. We have a dictator who created a motion that more or less says, “We are going to tell you when you are going to speak, what you are going to speak on, and by the way, we will tell you what the bill might be, just before we introduce it.” That is not democracy.

Democratic reform is a bit of a joke after the actions we have just seen. The Prime Minister has taken away the ability of the opposition to oppose. That is what we do. That is our mandate.

I am going to be looking for the consequences that Canadians are asking me about. The question of privilege will be going to PROC, which is rigged up and has a majority of Liberal members on it, but what sort of consequences will there be for our Prime Minister?

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my take-away from this morning, from the Prime Minister, was that he is indeed sorry. The other two things I took away from it are that he has learned nothing and that he is not going to change. That is my take-away from it.

I want to ask the member if he would explain to the House, if I had done the same thing as the Prime Minister did yesterday but grabbed the Liberal whip and elbowed a Liberal female member of Parliament, what might have happened to me today. I would probably be kicked out of caucus, and maybe asked to resign as a member of Parliament. I want the member to outline what might have happened if I had done the same thing in this House.

● (1350)

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, I suspect the member would not have had the opportunity to ask that question.

If the member was in the workplace as an employer, and he walked in and grabbed an employee within that business, hauled the person out, turned around and went back, and maybe accidentally knocked one of the ladies around, I can almost guarantee he would not have the privilege he has in this place of showing up for work the next day.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

He did not really talk about this in his speech, but does doing politics differently mean not only pushing the parliamentary agenda through, but also pushing opposition members around?

In his opinion, is this the new way of doing politics that the Prime Minister promised Canadians during the election campaign? Is this the Liberals' new modus operandi, pushing the parliamentary agenda through and pushing opposition members around?

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, what happened was the Prime Minister either did not know about the process, or I believe just had the arrogance to say “I’ll fix this” because they were not moving fast enough according to his agenda, and he just strong-armed our whip to get him up there. Unfortunately, because of the lack of process that he followed—after all, he has to know it, he is the Prime Minister of this country—he got into the issue of abusing an individual. There is absolutely no justification for that, and we cannot in this place minimize the situation that happened here yesterday, brought on by the Prime Minister of Canada.

Privilege

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what troubled me the most is the Prime Minister of Canada is not just the leader of the government and the leader of his political party, but he is also Canada's leader. He is also charged with leading and providing an example to the institutions and agencies that are federal responsibility.

At a time that the RCMP and the Canadian Armed Forces have been struggling with workplace issues themselves, what example does the Prime Minister of Canada set when he feels that a simple apology, which I think most accept here today, ends the situation? Leadership by example would mean that he charts a course to show Canadians that that incident is not indicative of the federal government's approach to tolerance in the workplace. We expect a plan going forward by the Prime Minister.

I would like to ask the hon. member what he thinks the Prime Minister should do now that the apology has been made. What leadership by example should he show in the days going forward?

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for the amazing work that he did when he was minister of veterans affairs, in terms of the respect that our country has for our veterans.

We have heard from the RCMP about the abuse that has happened. Let me just say one thing. This morning we were at an event that was covered by representatives from around the world. At one time our Prime Minister said "Canadians know Canada is broken. It's time for real change. It's time to do things differently". Well, he just did. I had people from different parts of the world this morning ask me what happened to Canada yesterday.

An hon. member: Real change.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Real change, Mr. Speaker.

On October 22, 2014, when there was the attack in Parliament, people said "Not in Canada. This cannot happen in Canada". The same sentiment is happening right now. How can this happen in Canada, for our Prime Minister to discredit this country with his authority?

• (1355)

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—University, CPC): Mr. Speaker, looking at the clock, I appear to have about six minutes, but before I go on, I would like to note that I will be splitting my time with the member for Niagara Falls.

The last time I rose in the House to speak, it was concerning the trans-Pacific partnership. I thought perhaps the next time I would speak on natural resources, or agriculture, or perhaps issues relating to my constituency in the Saskatoon area, as Saskatoon—University is the name of my riding. I never thought that I would be involved in a debate concerning a matter such as we had in the House last night.

Many members have been referring to their length of service in the House and that they have not seen something like this. I am not the longest serving member of the House, but I have been here almost 12 years. June 2004 was my first election. I have to say I have seen not always the best behaviour, but I have not seen a physical altercation between members, particularly senior members of the front bench. It has been noted in *Hansard* that backbenchers over the years have done things to threaten each other. The members in this

room know this, but people reading this in *Hansard* or watching this on TV need to grasp that this is unique.

I want to frame my remarks in the context that not only do we need to know how to behave in the House, but we need for Canadians to understand how we generally behave, that this situation is unique, and why it is so particularly unacceptable.

It is very unfortunate that often many Canadians only tune in to see some of the highlights, or in this case the lowlights, of a parliamentary day. It is difficult sometimes to explain, as one goes around to schools or talks with constituents, that by and large the decorum of this place, the relationships we have with members of other parties are actually quite good and productive.

In the 12 years I have been here, I have served on interparliamentary trips with members, particularly to Washington, but to other places, I have worked on committees, and I have seen the debate in the House. Yet when we talk to Canadians about the House of Commons, they think of the most chaotic incidents in question period and incidents like what happened last night, and the House is brought into disrepute. This is one of the things I was pondering as I was thinking about my remarks.

The actions that happened last night in the House most directly affected the member for Berthier—Maskinongé, but it also affects each and every member because the credibility of this place goes down. That is a very serious thing. We are having a debate in the House and starting to engage on the concept of broader electoral reform, and the argument is often made that Canadians do not respect this place and that is why voter rates are going down. Whether or not that argument is true, I do not know.

The issue that this does bring is that, when there are Canadians who tune in, particularly Canadians who are not good students of politics, not people who follow *Hansard*, the debates, or question period closely, this will be their impression of this place. This will be their impression of each and every member of this place. There are 338 of us who had our reputations damaged last night.

The Prime Minister has apologized and we in this place take him at his word, but the difficulty is that the damage will still be done. Over the years, I have seen poor behaviour in committees. I have never seen someone strike, come over, or touch someone else in committees. I have seen it almost happen, but not quite happen.

That is one of the things I will take away from this debate. I want to emphasize to Canadians who are watching that the behaviour of members of Parliament is positive most of the time. We are collegial. I have friends in the Liberal caucus, and I have had friends in the NDP caucus over the years. Events like this damage our working relationships with each other.

I will pause here and resume my final remarks after question period.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

●(1400)

[English]

KOMAGATA MARU

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been a long journey to get to yesterday's historic apology for the *Komagata Maru* tragedy. More than nine years ago, I made a statement here urging for a formal apology in the House of Commons.

I, along with many Canadians across our nation, including Mr. Sahib Thind and the Professor Mohan Singh Memorial Foundation, have fought tirelessly for official recognition of this travesty of justice. Yesterday marked the end of a long journey, with the apology delivered by our Prime Minister, not only for the Punjabi community but for all Canadians. It marked a new era for our country that is founded on respect, dignity, and equality for all. I thank the Prime Minister.

* * *

NATIONAL ORDER OF THE LEGION OF HONOUR

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize two constituents from my riding: Mr. Allan McPhail of Cannington and Mr. Gordon Allen of Fowlers Corners. These men were both awarded, by order of the President of the Republic of France, the rank of knight of the French National Order of the Legion of Honour, the highest honour France awards to foreigners for their involvement in the liberation of France during World War II. These brave soldiers, like so many others, fought to protect our rights and freedoms.

My riding has a tradition of supporting and commemorating our military and its history. Just last weekend, I had the pleasure to attend the 100th anniversary of the departure of the 109th Battalion of Victoria and Haliburton counties for the First World War. Also, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Kawartha Lakes just completed a series of murals recognizing the lives and stories of Victoria County during those great wars.

I would like to conclude by thanking all those who have served, fought, and died to protect our values and beliefs; and by thanking those who are currently serving in the Canadian Armed Forces.

* * *

KOMAGATA MARU

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked an important moment in the history of this country. It recognized that Canada does not have a perfect history, that we have on occasion stumbled and been unjust. It also recognized that healing wounds is important, that being an example to the rest of the world must necessarily entail admitting to our own wrongdoings, and that we must address head-on when our nation has fallen short of its potential.

The *Komagata Maru* incident was a dark moment in our history that should be a shame to all Canadians, and remains deeply painful to Indo-Canadians to this day. However, it is also a reflection of how

we have changed, opened, and become more tolerant in a Canada that is welcoming to all.

I thank the victims' descendants for their patience and the endurance they have shown through this dark episode in our history.

* * *

KOMAGATA MARU

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in this House today to recognize the *Komagata Maru* incident. The *Komagata Maru* arrived in Vancouver in May 1914, and it was carrying passengers of mostly Sikh descent. The Government of Canada turned away the boat and they were forced to return to India, a decision that resulted in the deaths of many passengers.

We will never forget about the prejudice suffered by the Sikh community as a result of this incident. I am proud that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, on behalf of the Government of Canada has recognized—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member is a new member of course, and he needs to remember that we do not speak of hon. colleagues by name. I think he is referring to the right hon. Prime Minister, so I will let him finish quickly.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: Mr. Speaker, I am proud that the Prime Minister, on behalf of the Government of Canada, has recognized this incident and has apologized in the House of Commons.

Our country is defined by its diversity. The *Komagata Maru* serves as a reminder that we must continue to fight against prejudice.

* * *

LEGAL AID

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, access to justice is a basic democratic right. In the opinion of Legal Aid Alberta president Suzanne Polkosnik, access to justice should be considered an essential service. That must also include access to legal counsel.

Yet, a growing number of Canadians are forced to represent themselves due to under-funding of legal aid. In Alberta, the demand for legal aid is increasing, due to a financial downturn and rising unemployment. Many people earning less than full-time minimum wage are being denied.

Federal support for legal aid has not been increased in almost a decade, and has not kept pace with the population growth. Federal dollars allocated to Alberta provide a mere eight days of legal aid. Yet, demand for legal aid increased with the imposition of mandatory minimum sentences and tougher immigration laws. Yes, it is reassuring that the government has promised to restore the court challenges program to protect charter rights, but a far deeper financial commitment is urgently needed to ensure every Canadian is accorded equal access to justice.

●(1405)

SYDENHAM DISTRICT HOSPITAL

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the people of Wallaceburg in my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex have enjoyed outstanding health care in their community. The Sydenham District Hospital and its emergency department have served Wallaceburg, Walpole Island First Nation, and our area for almost 60 years.

Recently, the Sydenham emergency department was recognized by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care for its outstanding performance by achieving the greatest reduction in wait times in the province for small rural hospitals.

I invite everyone in this great House of Commons to join me in congratulating the emergency department physicians, nurses, and support staff at Sydenham District Hospital. We are thankful for their amazing service.

* * *

SRI LANKA

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, torrential rainfall throughout Sri Lanka has tragically resulted in widespread flooding and landslides. According to the Disaster Management Centre of Sri Lanka, more than 418,000 people have been affected in 22 of the 25 districts, 41 people have been confirmed dead, and 16 are reported missing. Nearly 303,000 people have been displaced.

On behalf of all members of the House, I want to offer our sincere condolences and heartfelt sympathy to the people of Sri Lanka during this difficult time.

Government of Canada officials are in contact with the High Commissioner of Canada to Sri Lanka and continue to closely monitor the developing situation.

Additionally, the Canadian Red Cross is assessing humanitarian needs on the ground.

Canada stands ready to provide humanitarian assistance as appropriate, and I reiterate our sympathies to the people of Sri Lanka at this difficult time.

* * *

EGYPTAIR FLIGHT MS804

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today we learned of the tragic fate of EgyptAir flight MS804, travelling from Paris to Cairo. We have also sadly learned that two Canadians were among the passengers on this flight.

On behalf of the government, and I am sure all members in this House, our thoughts are with the families and loved ones of those lost.

The government is providing consular assistance to the families of these two Canadians on this flight. Canadian officials are working closely with authorities to confirm whether there were any additional Canadian citizens on this flight, and they immediately deployed to the airport and government agencies to ascertain the facts and provide the most effective support to families.

Statements by Members

Global Affairs Canada is also working with its French and Egyptian counterparts, as well as other impacted countries, to assess the situation and consider any requests for support.

Again, we want to express our profound sympathy and condolences to the families and friends of the victims of this terrible event.

* * *

FORT MCMURRAY FIRE

Mr. Martin Shields (Bow River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am a proud Canadian, a proud Albertan, and a proud resident of Bow River.

It has been tough times, especially in Alberta and some of the communities in my riding, but last week, in Chestermere, Strathmore, and Brooks, the volunteers, businesses, and community leaders, on very short notice, got together and held fundraisers for the toughest of people having a hard time in Fort McMurray. In just a few hours in those three communities, they filled truckloads with goods and raised \$100,000.

I am a proud Canadian, a proud Albertan, but I could not be prouder of my constituency.

* * *

KOMAGATA MARU

Mr. Darshan Singh Kang (Calgary Skyview, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was proud to stand as a member of Parliament during the apology in the House of Commons for denying entry to the 352 passengers on the *Komagata Maru* into Canada in 1914. This incident is only one of many where prejudices and fears directly resulted in further injustice, discrimination, and harm to others.

I am a proud Sikh, and I am also a proud Canadian. What makes our nation great is that we can have national pride while practising our spiritual and cultural beliefs at the same time.

This apology is more than redressing one incident. It tells the world that we are a nation that is willing to acknowledge our wrongs and even, more than 100 years later, apologize for them, and make sure we continue to address these problems as they persist in the present day.

I thank our government for being committed to ensuring that our Canadian values are upheld—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Nepean.

* * *

●(1410)

KOMAGATA MARU

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, *namaskar. Sat Sri Akal. As-salaam alaikum.*

My hon. colleague, the member for Kitchener Centre, joins me in sharing this message.

Statements by Members

Yesterday marked the closure of a dark chapter in Canadian history. The right hon. Prime Minister, on behalf of the Government of Canada, apologized for the treatment of those on board the *Komagata Maru*.

The ship brought people from the pre-independence undivided Indian subcontinent, which today is comprised of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. The passengers were predominately Sikhs, but also included Hindus and Muslims.

The reminder of the incident has strengthened our resolve to be more open and inclusive. The Canadian way of life celebrates diversity. I look forward to welcoming many Sikh, Hindu, Muslim, and other religious immigrants, not only from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, but also from other nations and cultures in the years to come.

Canada is strong, not in spite of its differences but because of them.

* * *

CHILD AND MATERNAL HEALTH

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member of Parliament for Calgary Nose Hill and the Canadian delegation at the Women Deliver conference going on in Copenhagen this week. This is the fourth global conference dedicated to the health and human rights of women and girls. I am proud of Canada's continued leadership on these issues.

Two hundred million children have their physical development and wellness affected by acute malnutrition, and tragically, 110,000 children die at birth due to anemia. These statistics are as unacceptable as they are disturbing, which is why Canada must continue to play a leadership role. In 2010, due to the leadership of the MP from Calgary Heritage, Canada's Muskoka initiative made children and maternal health a critical development goal for Canada and the G7.

The Women Deliver conference will continue sustainable development based upon equality, education, and empowerment for women and girls across the globe.

I know that my nine-year-old daughter Mollie, and girls across Canada, expect all girls to have the rights and opportunities they do. This should remain our goal.

* * *

KOMAGATA MARU

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, nearly 102 years ago, a crowded ship left Hong Kong carrying 376 passengers, most being immigrants of the Punjab region of British India. The *Komagata Maru* arrived on the western coast of Canada and was denied the right to dock because of the passengers on board. These 376 Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims were not welcome in Canada due to the country's exclusionary laws, specifically targeted at Indians. That was 1914.

Today, it is 2016, and I stand proud with a government that has formally apologized for the *Komagata Maru* incident and Canada's historically unfair immigration laws.

I am honoured to be a representative in a country that recognizes its historical injustices. It is because of our ability to change that multiculturalism, inclusion, and diversity have become the backbone of Canadian society.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MONT-SAINT-HILAIRE

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to underscore the 50th anniversary of the City of Mont-Saint-Hilaire. We celebrated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the town in 2012, and this year we are celebrating the amalgamation of Saint-Hilaire-sur-Richelieu, the town, and Mont Saint-Hilaire, the mountain, to create the municipality we have today.

Mont-Saint-Hilaire is truly a city of art, heritage, and nature, as exemplified by the Centre de la nature du mont Saint-Hilaire, a nature centre at the heart of Canada's first UNESCO biosphere, designated in 1978; renowned Quebec artists, such as Ozias Leduc, Paul-Émile Borduas, and Jordi Bonet; and cultural institutions, such as the Maison amérindienne, which showcases aboriginal cultures, and the Musée des beaux-arts, which features fine art.

I want to pay special tribute to the first mayor of the city, Jean-Guy Sénécal, with whom I had the honour of signing the golden anniversary book during a 50th anniversary ceremony on May 2.

I wish the people of Mont-Saint-Hilaire a happy 50th anniversary. Long live Mont-Saint-Hilaire.

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[*English*]

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS NO. 6

Mr. Gordon Brown (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we went from sunny ways to a dark week in Parliament. We had altercations on the floor of the House; chaotic scheduling of business without notice; the moving of dilatory motions by the government, delaying its own legislation; and the closing of debate on Bill C-14, the first time in history that such measures were used on a moral conscience issue.

Then we wake up Wednesday morning to Motion No. 6, a motion that proposes to legislate by exhaustion, offering unstructured, open-ended debate, potentially sitting 24 hours a day around the clock, all summer long, and when the government is satisfied it has forced through enough business, it can bail out without notice and without a vote.

Motion No. 6 targets the opposition and hamstring its ability to hold the government to account. It disenfranchises the 60.5% of Canadians who voted for those opposition members. Even the 39.5% of Canadians who voted Liberal will not appreciate or be well-served by the crippling of the opposition.

Motion No. 6 must be withdrawn from the Order Paper and never repeated again.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order, please. The banging of desks is not appreciated nor permitted here. Let us not have that.

The hon. member for Surrey Centre.

* * *

KOMAGATA MARU

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 102 years ago, Narang Singh, my wife's great-grandfather, embarked on a journey, along with 375 other men, women, and children, on a ship called the *Komagata Maru*.

It sailed the open seas to a land that promised hope and opportunity. After months of travel, they saw a coast with lands that stretched from sea to sky. However, as they were getting ready to disembark, officers stormed the ship and told them, "Go back to where you came from." They could not understand what law they had broken. For months, they were given no food or water. They were sent back.

Narang Singh was shot and detained but continued to fight for his rights. His dream never died.

Now four generations of his family have called this land home. Yesterday, they sat above us and said, "Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister."

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night the Prime Minister's temper got the best of him, but his behaviour was just an extension of his government's approach to the House. Increasingly, Liberals treat the House and the voices of Canadians with arrogance and disrespect, and nowhere is that more clear than in Motion No. 6, which would strip the opposition of all of its tools to hold the government to account.

Will the Prime Minister put the words of his apology this morning into action and withdraw this offensive motion?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have listened to the comments made by all of our colleagues and I would like to inform the House that a short while ago, we withdrew Motion No. 6 from the Order Paper.

Our objective remains to work with everyone to find the proper mechanism to extend the sitting hours to allow for a more respectful debate on government legislation and I look forward to working with all members of the House to achieve that objective.

* * *

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a great start, showing all of the members in the House and Canadians that the Prime Minister respects them.

In that spirit, I am going to ask him this. Will his government also allow every member who wants to speak on the issue of assisted dying, which is a conscience issue, the opportunity to speak?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that we have been trying to extend the hours and allow for more debate on this very important issue. I think all colleagues will agree with the Leader of the Opposition that we recognize the importance and sensitivity of Bill C-14. It is an issue that touches the lives of many Canadians and all parliamentarians, and we will continue to look for a way to extend the debate and allow every member who wants to speak to speak.

However, we also respect the deadline that the Supreme Court of Canada has asked Parliament to respect and we think there is a proper way to balance those two interests.

• (1420)

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Supreme Court decision is one decision, but Parliament also has a voice, and that is the voice of every Canadian.

Shutting down a debate on a conscience issue is unprecedented, so I will ask the House leader again. We know the Prime Minister has shut down debates time and time again and continues to treat democracy as an inconvenience, but he has two choices here. One is that he can side with us and Canadians and give them a voice. Will he show members of the House and Canadians that he respects them?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we intend to continue to show Parliament and Canadians that we respect the role of members of Parliament, particularly on an issue and a piece of legislation as sensitive and as compelling as medical assistance in dying, but we also respect the deadline that the Supreme Court imposed on Parliament. We have consistently said that we think it would be irresponsible to go beyond the deadline the Supreme Court gave Parliament and not have the appropriate pan-Canadian legislative framework in place. That continues to be our belief.

* * *

[Translation]

ALLEGED ACTIONS OF PRIME MINISTER IN CHAMBER

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister let his emotions get the best of him. We knew that, and now the Canadian public knows as well. His behaviour yesterday was unworthy of the office of Prime Minister of Canada.

Can the Prime Minister or one of his representatives explain why he lost his self-control yesterday under the circumstances? Was it because things were not going his way?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have heard the concerns of the House on the matter that took place last evening and we acknowledge those concerns. Members of the House are aware of the fact that our Prime Minister issued an unreserved apology this morning. We look forward to continuing the work of the House in a tone of respect and I look forward to working with all of my colleagues in the House to further the work of Parliament.

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*[Translation]***PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING**

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her answer.

Naturally, we all have very strong feelings about Bill C-14. Our constituents elected each and every one of us to this place to debate the issues that matter to Canadians. The opposition members have done important work. We produced a dissenting report that was heeded and respected. I thank the government. We need to continue and go even further.

Do the Liberals plan to give members who want to have their say on behalf of Canadians in this debate the opportunity to speak?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, and as we have done from the beginning, we have every intention of giving all members a chance to speak, given the importance and sensitivity of Bill C-14.

However, we also recognize that the Supreme Court has given the government and Parliament a deadline, which is June 6. We believe it is important to strike a balance between the need to hear from all members and the need to abide by the Supreme Court ruling and pass balanced legislation by that deadline.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that the government has finally listened to reason and withdrawn Motion No. 6, which was nothing less than a straitjacket imposed on the Parliament of Canada.

Nonetheless, it will take more than that to change the prevailing climate around here. For weeks, the government has repeatedly used closure motions for no good reason.

Will the Prime Minister also stop the excessive use of closure motions here in Parliament in order to give members a chance to speak?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said a few moments ago, we have withdrawn Motion No. 6 from the Order Paper.

We are always looking for opportunities to work with all our colleagues in the House of Commons in order to extend the hours of debate in a respectful and appropriate tone and to allow Parliament to study our government's important bills.

However, we are aware that we have obligations to Canadians and we intend to carry out our term in a respectful manner and to work with all parties on this measure.

● (1425)

[English]

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad the Liberals have finally taken back Motion No. 6. That was the most draconian power grab that any government has ever attempted in Canadian history. It is good that they have pushed that back.

However, there are other ways the government can finally start working with opposition parties. It can stop the rush to closure. It can actually provide calendars so we know what is being debated day to day. It can stop changing the Order Paper at the last minute.

Will the government finally start working with opposition parties in this Parliament?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have consistently tried to work constructively with all members of the House.

We agree with the colleagues across the way that it is important to have more respectful debate on legislation and on motions. We also agree with my colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby that certainty and predictability, as he just referenced in terms of the Order Paper, are important parts of respectful parliamentary debate.

We will continue to work with all members to improve these issues, but we will also be conscious of the commitments we made to Canadians and the important legislation we have before the House. It is our intention to find the appropriate way to pass it.

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here is the reality. Here is what has been happening.

By its own actions, the government showed a deep disrespect for Parliament this week. There are serious and substantial issues before the House. The Liberals are shutting down debate and stripping the ability of MPs to hold them to account.

Whether they voted for a government or an opposition member, Canadians want their voices heard. When exactly did the Liberals decide to turn their back on sunny ways in favour of these strong arm tactics?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague on the other side of the aisle that it is important to have more respectful debate in Parliament.

I hope she will agree with me that, particularly with respect to Bill C-14, medical assistance in dying, we have tried on numerous occasions to allow the House to continue for extended hours so all members of Parliament can be heard on this important issue. We will continue to urge the House to do that.

However, we are also conscious of the deadline that the Supreme Court imposed on Parliament, and we think it is important to have the appropriate balanced legislative framework in place by that deadline.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they gave us the same old story as the former Conservative government, and they even went further.

They want to give themselves all the power in the House in order to force us to pass their problem-riddled bills, to force us to accept the loss of 2,400 jobs at Aveos, even though that broke the law, and to force us to accept their solution to medical assistance in dying, even if it goes against the Supreme Court ruling.

When exactly did the Liberals decide to move from their sunny ways to bully tactics?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it comes as no surprise to anyone that I do not fully agree with my colleague.

However, I do agree with her that we need to encourage more respectful debates in the House on all the important bills that the government has introduced in Parliament to fulfill the promises that we made to Canadians during the last election campaign. We will continue, as we always have, to try to work with everyone in order to arrive at a proper conclusion.

* * *

[English]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition comes to the House to represent the 60% of Canadians who do not support the Liberals.

In the past few days, the Liberals have been pulling their own fire alarms to prevent MPs from doing their work. They tried to punish us for their mistake by bringing in Motion No. 6. We appreciate the fact that they have now announced that they are withdrawing that, but I do know that they are only withdrawing it after the massive backlash from not only opposition parties, but Canadians, and even their friends in the media.

The Prime Minister has withdrawn this anti-democratic motion to rig the rules of the House. Will he now withdraw his anti-democratic attempts to rig the voting system by changes to the electoral system?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all agree that our democratic institutions must evolve. We all agree, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition just said, that we represent the voices of the Canadians who brought us to this place.

We need to take responsibility for this privilege and work together to ensure that the changes we bring forward are relevant to the 21st century and include the voices of those who do not normally engage in this process.

Mr. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals need to take responsibility for the bizarre actions of the Liberal government over the past few days.

Motion No. 6 was a glimpse into the mind of a Prime Minister when he does not get his way. Canadians have every reason to be worried about what the Liberals plan to do with the voting system of Canadians.

Will the government commit to dropping its attempts to rig the system and promise Canadians a referendum?

● (1430)

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not accept the premise that this process has failed before it has even begun.

We need to work together to find common ground. We need to ensure that the voices of those Canadians who sent us to this place are reflected in the conversations.

I urge all members to bring their ideas forward and to help strengthen this process and our democratic institutions.

* * *

[Translation]

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government decided to withdraw Motion No. 6. That is a good thing. Well done. The government has also just told us that it will allow a free and full debate on Bill C-14. That is great.

However, we need to be careful. We got burned on the bill on medical assistance in dying. At second reading, on two separate occasions, government representatives rose to interrupt the debate and put an end to second reading. That is completely unacceptable. The Leader of the Government in the House of Commons is an honourable man. Will he give us his word that every parliamentarian who wants to speak to this bill will have the opportunity to do so and that no government representatives will rise to stop debate?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. As I said, we respect the need to ensure that all of our parliamentary colleagues have the opportunity to speak to the bill on medical assistance in dying, including our colleagues in the Senate. That is what all parliamentarians want.

However, as I said, we are under a deadline from the Supreme Court. We did not choose that deadline, but we are going to try to meet it. We are going to try to work with everyone to find the right balance.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was not my question. Will the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons rise and give his word that no government representative will rise to stop debate on this very sensitive bill at second and third reading, yes or no? There is no call for partisanship on this bill. We want the minister to give his word.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope that my colleague will agree with me that we have tried many times to find a way to extend the hours of debate. At one point, I even moved exactly the same motion as my colleague from Regina—Qu'Appelle, but the House did not support it.

Oral Questions

We remain optimistic and we are going to work with everyone to ensure that as many people as possible are able to speak to Bill C-14. However, we are also going to show respect for the Supreme Court and the decision that it imposed on Parliament.

* * *

[English]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government promised a new era of respect for Parliament. Instead, after just six months, we have the Liberals shutting down debate for the first time in our history on an end-of life conscience matter.

The Liberals tried to rig the rules of this place to the government's total advantage through Motion No. 6. We commend them for withdrawing that, but now they are trying to rig the very system that elects members to this place.

The minister has just said that we need to hear the voices of those Canadians who brought us to this place. Those were 17.5 million voices that will be excluded by her closed, Liberal-controlled parliamentary process.

Why will the government not really demonstrate a commitment to democratic reforms through a referendum?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Leader of the Opposition said in her remarks at the beginning of question period today, we represent the voice of every Canadian. I would urge my colleagues in the House to move beyond the repetitive questions asked every day. Let us engage in a productive exchange of ideas. Let us work together and seize this historic opportunity to bring our electoral system into the 21st century.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I invite the minister to move beyond her repetitive non-answers, beyond her refusal to allow the Canadian people to decide the manner by which they elect their representatives.

The minister stands and pretends that a few hundred witnesses at a committee are more inclusive than a referendum that could involve 17 million or more voters. What does she not understand about this?

This is a simple question of the legitimacy of this place. Does the government really think Canadians will accept a rigged system chosen by and for the Liberal Party of Canada?

● (1435)

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, we have not decided on a system yet. We have simply taken the first step in fulfilling our promise to Canadians, over 60% of whom who said our democratic institutions needed to be modernized, needed to be strengthened, needed to be more relevant. We took that first step a week and a day ago. We introduced a motion to bring together an all-party parliamentary committee, and we look forward to working with all members and not prejudging the outcome of that work.

[Translation]

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after applauding Quebec's non-partisan approach in dealing with medical assistance in dying, the Liberal government is taking the exact opposite approach.

It is stifling debate, refusing to listen to experts about the constitutionality of the bill, and rejecting the opposition's most important amendments. Even the Alberta Court of Appeal has contradicted the government. Bill C-14 does not comply with the Carter ruling.

How can the Liberals put forward a bill that could be challenged the very moment it is passed?

[English]

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member that it is very important that we move ahead. The Supreme Court has made it clear to us that Canadians have a right to medical assistance in dying. We have seen, even this week, by the decision that was made in Alberta at a Court of Appeal, that in fact it is very important that a regulatory framework be put in place so this assistance can be provided safely.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, legislation on medical assistance in dying is a difficult, sensitive issue. Canadians have legitimate and heartfelt concerns and all of us in this place share a responsibility to get this right. It has been so disappointing to see the government's approach. It rejected an all-party committee report, ignored testimony about the unconstitutional nature of the bill, and rejected amendments that would fix that. All the while, it falsely claims that everything is the opposition's fault.

Will the government drop the strong-armed tactics and work with us to fix this deeply flawed bill?

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as has been said many times, this is a deeply complex and personal issue. We have been working incredibly hard with all members in the House to have detailed discussions to ensure we comply with the Supreme Court of Canada's deadline, to ensure that we have in place a legal framework for medical assistance in dying in our country, a framework that will ensure there is balance between personal autonomy and protections of the vulnerable. We need to have a system in place by June 6 to ensure safeguards are in place around medical assistance in dying in our country.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems that sunny ways have quickly turned into "Sonny, get the bleep out of my way". That is the elbows up approach the Prime Minister took in this Parliament yesterday, but it also seems to be the approach he is taking to voting reform. He is trying to rig the next election in the favour of the Liberals.

Is the Prime Minister really so arrogant that he thinks he can impose his will on Canadians without giving them a say in a referendum?

Oral Questions

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have not decided on a system yet. We have put forward a committee to study a wide range of electoral reform options, including proportional representation and alternative voting, including online voting and mandatory voting. That process has just begun and we need to work together to ensure the voices of Canadians are included in that conversation, and that we use the tools available to us in the 21st century to do this in the most meaningful and inclusive way possible.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals arrogance knows no bounds. It is quite evident that the Prime Minister has absolutely no respect for this place and the democracy it represents. The Liberals are trying to ram through electoral reform just like they tried to ram through the opposition yesterday. Does the Prime Minister think that he can also manhandle democracy, or will he let Canadians have a say in a referendum?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that we all agree that the status quo must end. Over 60% of Canadians voted for change. They voted for parties—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1440)

The Speaker: Order, please. If members disagree, they get a chance to say so. Let us each have our turn. Let us listen.

Yesterday, the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London, as I left the chamber, was kind enough to offer me a bottle of headache medicine. I would just ask her to keep it on standby.

The hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Monday we learned via Twitter that even the Prime Minister's principal secretary thinks that holding a referendum is not a bad way to conduct consultations.

Can the minister and the Prime Minister respect the opinion of the 62% of Canadians who did not vote for them, forget about partisanship on such a fundamental issue, and tell us if they are rejecting the idea of a referendum just because it is a good Conservative proposal?

[*English*]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have some headache medicine in my desk, should you wish to have any.

Democracy is more than just about voting. Democracy is about ensuring that the voices of those who are normally engaged in the process are included to ensure that we are the strongest that we can be.

In the past, we have extended the right to vote to women and to indigenous persons, and it has been Conservative governments, Progressive Conservative governments that have done this. This was the right thing to do. It came to the House. The members took responsibility and brought forward the changes necessary. We need to demonstrate the same leadership.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the minister is wondering why the questions are repetitive, it may be because the answers are unsatisfactory.

Contrary to what the minister thinks, we are not the only ones who believe that a referendum is a good option. Canadians and the media are also wondering about the process put in place by the Liberal government.

Yesterday, a respected *Toronto Star* journalist said, “[The minister] has so far succeeded in burning bridges where she should have been building some...It is an unsustainable proposition.”

Will the minister acknowledge that a referendum is the best way to respectfully consult all Canadians?

[*English*]

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, is a referendum a tool, a means of engaging Canadians? Yes, it is. However, is it the best tool? It is not the best tool. During previous referenda in Ontario and in B.C., nearly 50% of the population did not participate. Is that okay? We need to work together, and we need to work harder, to ensure that our democratic institutions are inclusive and the systemic barriers that exist today are addressed by all 338 members of the House.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Canadian Heritage had this to say about the sale of Maison Radio-Canada: “I now expect CBC/Radio-Canada to take the next steps in the process in a transparent manner”.

Yesterday, the CBC/Radio-Canada board of directors did not say much. There was no information about the cost, the size, or the number of studios. Nothing at all. Since the vast majority of the board members are partisan appointees, that is worrisome. It is also worrisome because one of the companies selected is best known for the *Îlot Voyageur* fiasco in Montreal that cost taxpayers millions of dollars.

Can the minister demand that all of the details about this enormous project be made public? Is that not the least she should do?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our public broadcaster, CBC/Radio-Canada, is finally looking to the future. We have reinvested in CBC/Radio-Canada, and we also made sure that it put forward two feasible scenarios together with its board of directors.

I understand my colleague's feelings about appointments to the CBC/Radio-Canada board of directors, and in the coming weeks, I will introduce an independent, merit-based appointment process to secure good directors.

That said, I would like to remind my colleague of the arm's-length—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Drummond.

*Oral Questions***OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the report by the Commissioner of Official Languages, which was tabled today, shows once again that violations of the act are still a common occurrence. There was an excellent example of that this week. Energy east submitted its application to the National Energy Board in English only. That is simply unacceptable.

How can the Minister of Canadian Heritage, who is also supposedly responsible for official languages, justify the fact that francophones will have to wait another month in order to be able to access the documents in their language?

• (1445)

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Bilingualism and official languages are a priority for our government. We will ensure not only that the energy east project complies with the Official Languages Act, but also that both official languages are promoted. I will work with my colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources, to ensure that that is the case.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Gatineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the parliamentary budget office noted several positive elements regarding the details in the supplementary estimates (A).

Can the President of the Treasury Board tell us about his reaction to the report?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary budget officer's latest report confirms that our government is making significant progress in presenting its spending plans more transparently and in a more timely fashion to Parliament.

[English]

In his own words, the PBO said that these important improvements will enhance "parliamentary financial scrutiny".

Our government has and is raising the bar on openness, transparency, and accountability to Parliament.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister misled Canadians on three separate occasions when he said he consulted—

The Speaker: Order, please. Members seem to be heckling their own side here. Let us have order. The hon. member for Lethbridge has the floor. Let us hear her question.

Ms. Rachael Harder: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister misled Canadians on three separate occasions when he said that he consulted the opposition on electoral reform. He said to Canadians to trust him, that he will design an electoral system that is ideal for Canada.

The Prime Minister's failure of leadership this week shows why Canadians need to make their own decisions with regard to how they

vote. A referendum is absolutely the only safeguard that Canadians have against this tyrannical Prime Minister. Why is the Prime Minister so afraid to hold a referendum?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in this House, every single vote has an equal weight. What this Prime Minister committed to was bringing together a committee made up of parliamentarians, to study and review possible electoral reform options, including online voting and mandatory voting. The final decision will come to this House, where every member has an equal voice and an equal vote.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's unstable leadership has been on absolute full display this week for us. Whether it be misleading Canadians about his made-up consultations with the opposition or his absolutely bizarre behaviour last night, the Prime Minister is out of control. Will he do us all a favour and take a remedial course in civics and perhaps learn the basics of democracy? Will he also do the right thing and give Canadians the final say in how governments are elected? Will the Prime Minister respect the voices of each and every Canadian by holding a referendum? Yes, or no?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister did the right thing and apologized sincerely and wholeheartedly. Let us accept that.

For those who are interested in reforming our electoral system, let us work together. I know that many members have great ideas and they cannot wait to share them. I ask them to bring them forward so that we can ensure that the modernization that needs to occur occurs with the best ideas and the most inclusive approach possible.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today's *Toronto Star* says that the minister's handling of the electoral reform file is "asinine", "disingenuous", and "discredited". The *Star* also reports that "she is prone to explanations that defy logic". Those are the words of the *Toronto Star*, not mine. Here is the minister's chance to turn things around by actually giving a straightforward answer, which includes a yes or a no, to a straightforward question. Will the Liberal government hold a referendum to give Canadians a veto in its plans to change our electoral system?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, perhaps that is the flaw in this process. Electoral reform is neither simple nor easy to address. It is a complex question, with many underlying factors and many consequences. We need to work together to ensure that we answer those questions effectively, that the best ideas are brought forward, and the voices of those who do not normally have an opportunity to be included in this conversation are included in this conversation.

• (1450)

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): That is peachy, Mr. Speaker. They can all do that on Twitter, but in the meantime there should be a referendum at the end of the process put to all 35 million Canadians.

The minister has actually argued that her ongoing Twitter consultations are more inclusive than a referendum. She has actually said that. However, if she actually reads some of the responses she has received on Twitter, she will see that there are not many who think it is okay to rig the 2019 election. In fact, she will find what the media characterizes as a groundswell of opposition to her chosen process.

Given the minister's deep admiration for Twitter consultations, will she respect the wishes of those who are writing to her, and will she hold the referendum that they are requesting?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the 21st century, we have the technology available to us that did not exist even 10 years ago. We have the capacity and indeed the responsibility to take advantage and leverage these tools and ensure that the 19th century model we are currently operating under is improved and enhanced and brought into the 21st century.

* * *

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that the Liberals will fail to provide sufficient resources to Parks Canada to address the anticipated increase in visitors next year, but they are definitely failing to address the state of accessibility within our parks today for those with disabilities. Accessible infrastructure has declined, all-terrain vehicles have disappeared, and the maintenance and upkeep of trails and facilities have fallen off. These parks belong to all of us.

Will the government step up and ensure that our national parks are accessible for all Canadians, including those with disabilities?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am particularly excited that the very first part in my mandate letter is to engage in a consultation process that will lead to federal accessibility legislation. I just met this morning with the Trans Canada Trail executives, and I am excited to be working with them to make sure that our parks and trails are accessible.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been five years since Canada signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We still see barriers for people living with disabilities. Education, accessible housing, and employment have not been fully implemented. The Liberal government promised to form a persons with disabilities act, and now we need to see some action.

When is this going to happen? We have had absolutely no word yet, and it is very important for—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am working with stakeholders from a variety of disability groups as we design an inclusive and engaging consultation process that will lead to federal accessibility legislation, which will include access issues on a variety of areas of federal jurisdiction. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for us to do this, so we can help Canadians with disabilities have access to

Oral Questions

federal services, programs, and policies, and they do not have to wait to be discriminated against.

* * *

[Translation]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is being hypocritical when it comes to veterans. He made a solemn promise that they would never have to go to court against the government. Once elected, he reneged on that promise.

The Prime Minister is disrespectful toward our veterans and the members of the House.

Can he confirm right now that he will keep his word and drop the lawsuit in the Equitas case?

[English]

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): I find it ironic, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite can stand and accuse this government of anything. This came about because of years of neglect by the former government on this file.

We are delivering \$5.6 billion in financial security to veterans and their families. We have an aggressive mandate from our Prime Minister to do things better than the former government, and this includes a return to an option for a lifelong pension.

[Translation]

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is crystal clear. The Prime Minister misled veterans during the last election. In contrast, our Conservative prime minister always did what he said he would do. He certainly never made false promises, offering false hope.

Canada needs a respectful and consistent leader, not a schoolboy who shoves his colleagues. Can the Prime Minister finally show some leadership and stop this legal fight with our veterans in the Equitas case?

•(1455)

[English]

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear about the record. Here is what the former government did. It cut 800 front-line support staff workers who worked with our veterans. It closed nine offices. It ignored veterans for 10 long years.

We are not doing that on this side of the House. We are delivering in the budget \$5.6 billion in financial security to those men and women who have served and who need our support. We will continue to do this and implement our mandate letter. You will see that veterans and their families are going to do much better under our government than the former.

The Speaker: I think he means “they will see”.

Oral Questions

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the chief government whip. When is that member going to stand up against the arrogance of his government and stop driving injured veterans into court?

In the last election, the whip made a solemn vow to veterans to bring back lifetime pensions, full tuition payments, and a range of promises that the new government has already broken.

When will the chief government whip, a retired Canadian Armed Forces general, stand up and live up to the promises he made to our veterans?

Hon. Kent Hehr (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is acting aggressively on a mandate letter given by our Prime Minister.

In budget 2016, we have \$5.6 billion in financial benefits to those men and women who need our help and support. We are expanding our earnings loss benefit, improving access to the career impact allowance, and making the disability award more generous.

We are delivering for veterans, and we will continue to do so. It is really above the height of hypocrisy, these questions regarding this file from the former government.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Karen Ludwig (New Brunswick Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past Sunday, I had the opportunity to speak at the Lyme disease federal framework conference on behalf of New Brunswick Southwest constituents impacted by Lyme disease.

Listening to those impacted and the experts, it is clear we need more data on the devastating effects of Lyme disease across Canada.

Given that our government is committed to science and data, would the Minister of Health inform this House about the government's next steps, so that we can have better services and treatments for Lyme disease?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her work on behalf of people affected by Lyme disease.

As a physician myself, I understand the impact Lyme disease has on Canadians and their families. That is why I was so pleased to see over 700 Canadians participating in our three-day conference this week on Lyme disease.

We heard from patients about the need for better surveillance, enhanced awareness, and an increased investment in research, all of which will inform the federal framework that we will develop while working closely with our partners and stakeholders.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals are so concerned with the refugee numbers that they have forgotten the people themselves.

The Liberals have failed to support Syrian refugees once they arrive, and many of them are using food banks while making the transition to Canada.

How could the minister have been so arrogant as to suggest it is a Syrian cultural value to depend on food banks?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we know, many Canadians who have tight budgets use food banks.

I have stated that my comments on that issue were insensitive. I regret them. I repeat that in the House. I would also say that by my actions, I think I have shown myself unequivocally welcoming to all of our Syrian refugees.

* * *

[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if I told you that a company has not paid its employees in months, you would think that is unacceptable, right?

Well, that is what has been happening to federal government employees since the new pay system was implemented. Many employees have not received a paycheque in several months. There is a Service Canada employee on maternity leave who has not received anything in three months. Three months without pay.

What will the government do to ensure that the people who are affected can feed their families?

[English]

Hon. Judy Foote (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Phoenix is a new pay system that is replacing a 40-year-old system. Yes, there are some glitches to be expected, but we are working very closely to make sure, as every employee deserves to be paid, that every employee is paid on time.

Unfortunately, there are issues that we are trying to resolve. We are doing that by putting extra resources into the system to respond to it. To date we have had 1.4 million transactions, and of that number, we have 77 outstanding issues.

We are working very hard to deliver for all of our employees, who deserve to be paid for the work that they have performed.

* * *

● (1500)

PARKS AND CONSERVATION AREAS

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I met today with a group of paddlers who are joining me on a four-day canoe trip down the Dumoine River, a renowned wilderness destination. The Algonquin Anishinabe call it the Aginagwasi Sipi and it is located on their traditional territory.

Located two hours west of Parliament on the edge of Pontiac riding and flowing into the Ottawa River, the Dumoine watershed contains one of the largest areas of unfragmented southern boreal forests in Quebec.

Would the minister of Minister of Small Business and Tourism please tell this House how the government is helping ecotourism and the conservation economy succeed across Canada?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is investing more than \$40 million to develop national parks and marine conservation areas, with nearly \$17 million to expand the learn-to-camp program develop new programming to tell Canada's stories, encourage indigenous storytelling, and ecotourism opportunities.

Of course, we will be marking Canada's 150th by making admission to our national parks, conservation areas, and historical sites free of charge.

I would like to commend the hon. member for coordinating the paddle on the Ottawa River event for June 4 in conjunction with Tourism Pontiac and Paddle Canada. All members and their constituents are welcome to attend.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie—Mackenzie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a month ago, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food committed to extend the provisions of the Fair Rail for Grain Farmers Act. Unfortunately, up until now, we have not heard a single thing since that announcement. People are starting to believe that this is just another broken promise by the Liberals.

Will the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food stand right now and commit to extending these provisions immediately?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's concern. I can assure him that this issue will be addressed in a proper forum to take care that grain is delivered to the ports, and to make sure that our exports are kept in line.

We will make sure that we supply the transportation for Canadian farmers.

* * *

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ): Mr. Speaker, three years have gone by since the rail disaster in Lac-Mégantic. The people there are still waiting for a rail bypass so that they can rebuild their town with peace of mind.

However, Aecom is proposing that the track follow the same route as before, right through the downtown core, or that a bypass be built over the next 10 years. Both of those options are unacceptable.

The Prime Minister promised to get the bypass built. He even signed a petition in that regard. Will he keep his word and work to get the bypass built as quickly as possible?

Oral Questions

[English]

Ms. Kate Young (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to enhancing rail safety, and in budget 2016, we are investing \$143 million for rail safety and the transportation of dangerous goods. However, it is premature for comments on funding for a rail bypass before the study is completed.

The minister was honoured to meet citizens of the town recently to hear their stories first-hand. He knows that the municipal council and residents of Lac-Mégantic have an interest in relocating the rails away from the centre of town.

* * *

[Translation]

PHYSICIAN-ASSISTED DYING

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois commends the government for withdrawing Motion No. 6.

With regard to the bill on medical assistance in dying, the leader just said that he is prepared to hear from members. Is he prepared to listen to them?

The reasonably foreseeable natural death provision is not consistent with the Carter decision. Is the government prepared to support the Bloc Québécois' amendment to remove this criterion, which discriminates on the ground of age and bases eligibility on inhumane conditions such as hunger strikes?

[English]

Hon. Jody Wilson-Raybould (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his substantive engagement in the discussion around Bill C-14.

We are confident that we have made and put forward a public policy decision around medical assistance in dying in this country. This is a transformative piece of legislation on which we have engaged with many Canadians and many members within this House. We look forward to the continued discussion.

We look forward to ensuring that we reach our deadline of June 6 so that we will have a legislative framework in place for medical assistance in dying that is balanced and which speaks to this transformative piece in the period of time that we are in.

* * *

● (1505)

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Helena Jaczek, Minister of Community and Social Services for the Province of Ontario.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

*Government Orders***PRIVILEGE**

REFERENCE TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the motion that this question be now put.

The Speaker: Before question period, the member for Saskatoon—University had the floor and there are five minutes remaining in his speech. The hon. member for Saskatoon—University. No, he is finished.

Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Speaker: The question is on the motion that this question be now put. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: Orders of the day. No. I think the hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle is rising to assist the Chair.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, far be it from me to be a backseat driver, but what we just disposed of was the motion that this question be now put. Now we will need to put the question, and I think members are ready for that.

The Speaker: That is a fine idea. I thank the member for his assistance.

As I was saying, the next question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

•(1510)

[*English*]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

Hon. Diane Lebovillier (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.

An hon. member: On division.

(Motion agreed to)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I am pleased to speak today to Bill C-2, which would lower taxes for the middle class.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne: You can imagine how I feel, Mr. Speaker. I understand how you feel when you try to speak and everyone rises. I feel a little like that.

As I was saying, Bill C-2 would lower taxes for the middle class. During the pre-budget consultations, I travelled from Moncton to Yellowknife, and the Minister of Finance travelled from Nova Scotia to Vancouver. It was a very important issue to Canadians.

During our election campaign, we promised to lower taxes for the middle class because Canadians asked us to help them and their families—

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, please. I have a couple of things here. Members should know that they should leave the chamber and have their discussions outside. Perhaps the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Heritage might take their discussion outside. The President of the Treasury Board should know that they do not stand between the person speaking and the Speaker. I encourage them to take that outside.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Finance.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you for your wise remarks. We are talking about respect in the House and listening to one's colleagues.

I will come back to the important Bill C-2. As I was saying, during the election campaign, we promised to help the middle class because it drives our economy. When we consulted Canadians from coast to coast, they asked us to help them and their families and to grow the economy.

The first thing we did to help the middle class was to lower taxes, because we strongly believe that that is how we can help Canada's economy. That was the first thing we did, because Canadians told us that they wanted more money in their pockets in order to help their families and to grow the economy.

The second measure we are implementing, which was a key component of the latest budget, is the Canada child benefit. Members will understand that this is probably the most significant social measure since the introduction of universal health care in Canada. This measure will help nine out of 10 Canadian families and allow for simpler, tax-free benefits. This will truly help the families who need a bit more money. For example, it will help families send their kids to summer camp this summer and buy back-to-school clothes. This is exactly the kind of measure that Canadians want.

Government Orders

The second thing people asked us for was to grow the economy. In our budget, we included significant measures for infrastructure. We committed to investing \$11.9 billion in infrastructure. When we travelled across the country, people told us that public transit was a big part of what we had to do. In our society, moving people and goods is essential to economic activity. It not only costs more money when people cannot move freely, but it also has a significant impact on our economy. We therefore made a historic commitment of \$3.4 billion to be invested in public transit.

Now, let us talk about the important topic of water and waste water. We are also making around \$5 billion in investments in this area. These investments will make it possible to rebuild wastewater systems or invest in infrastructure, so that we can take charge or work with the provinces and territories to improve our country's wastewater treatment systems.

There are some very flagrant cases. We know that some communities still discharge sewage without primary treatment. We know how damaging that can be to the environment. The case involving Montreal, with mayor Coderre, was quite clear. We have seen the impact that can have, and that is why we decided to make a historic investment in this area.

I would like to talk about social infrastructure. Historic investments are being made in what is known as affordable housing for Canadians. Such investments will help us move forward, just as our historic investments in innovation will help to achieve the kind of economic growth in this country that Canadians expect.

As far as Bill C-2 is concerned, I can say that people have had more money in their pockets since January 2016 and they have realized how important that was. The Conservatives often tell us that, from their perspective, promises have been broken, but I can assure the House that investing in middle-class Canadians and reducing their taxes was what had to be done. That is what Canadians really wanted.

I have the privilege to be here today and to take part in this important debate on Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act, at third reading, with a view to providing Canada's middle class with a long-awaited tax break.

Since January 1, 2016, no fewer than nine million Canadians have been benefiting from this tax break. It is very important to understand that nine million Canadian men and women have been benefiting from this tax break since January 1.

●(1515)

The Liberal Party of Canada made this commitment during the election campaign. Since January 1, people have been benefiting from this tax break, which will enable us to invest in the economy. Canadians in every part of the country were asking the government to make investments and help their families. That is what we are hearing more and more, and that is exactly what this very important measure will enable us to do. The government was elected on the basis of a plan to grow the economy, and these changes are an important first step.

Personally, I made business and the law my career. I saw this investment as important, because it is exactly the kind of investment

that helps the economy grow: putting more money in the pockets of Canadians.

The bill in question amends the Income Tax Act to reduce the second personal income tax rate from 22% to 20.5% and introduce a new personal marginal tax rate of 33% for taxable income in excess of \$200,000.

During our campaign, we clearly stated our intention to help the middle class. It was the key point in our campaign. However, we also expected people with higher incomes to do more. Helping one another is part of the Canadian spirit and our identity. It was in the context of that promise that we announced our intention to Canadians. Today, I am happy to speak in the House about the fulfillment of that promise through Bill C-2.

This bill also amends other provisions of the act to reflect the new rate of 33%. It contains a number of rather technical measures. Obviously, when you change the top marginal tax rate in Canada, that entails a number of changes in the Income Tax Act. A number of provisions in the Income Tax Act are based on the marginal tax rate, which will now rise to 33%.

It also amends the act to reduce the annual contribution limit for tax-free savings accounts from \$10,000 to its previous level, which, with indexation, will be \$5,500 for 2016, effective January 1, 2016. We proposed to reduce this amount because we saw that only 6.7% of Canadians had taken advantage of the cumulative total that they could contribute to a tax-free savings account.

We told Canadians that our government would be based on science and facts. This measure was good public policy because, in its previous form, it benefited only a small group of Canadians.

We were elected to take measures that would benefit our economy, the middle class, and those who are working hard to join it. In December, at the first opportunity, the Minister of Finance introduced a tax cut that will put more money directly into the pockets of the middle class. I think Canadians realize that. On October 19, people made a wise choice. People wanted a government that would work for them, for the middle class, for those who are working hard to join the middle class, and for Canadian families.

As I said previously, some nine million Canadian men and women will benefit from this extremely important measure for equity and fairness in our country. The middle class has waited too long for an improvement. Despite the difficult economic situation, we have helped the middle class. We made a promise, and today I can say that we have kept that promise. Income tax has been reduced.

Government Orders

After this bill was introduced, our government tabled the 2016 budget, which is an essential step in ensuring economic growth and revitalizing the Canadian economy. Canada was built on optimism, often in the face of challenges that seemed insurmountable. However, the promise of a better life was broken over the past 10 years.

• (1520)

The confidence of many middle-class Canadians in the economy was shaken, and we wanted to restore it. For once, Canadians have a government that is standing up for them by taking measures that will promote economic development, while at the same time taking into account the most vulnerable people in our society, those who are in the middle class, and those who want to join it.

As I was saying, Canada was built on optimism, often in the face of challenges that seemed insurmountable. Even though our economy is still growing, middle-class Canadians are having difficulties.

Since I was elected, one of the most edifying things I have had the privilege of doing is to meet with those Canadians, from Moncton to Yellowknife. I went to small towns and meetings around the kitchen table where people explained their economic problems and the ways we could help them.

For once, we consulted people who had never been consulted before. It was the first time they had expressed their opinion on the federal budget and told people from the Department of Finance and the Minister of Finance, obviously, or me about their desire to see the Canadian economy grow and the need for inclusive growth.

For too long, middle-class people, families, and our young people were excluded from that growth. We had to restore such measures to benefit families and middle-class people.

Many Canadians are working harder and longer, while the cost of living keeps climbing. I remember meeting a family in Quebec City who asked for our help because they were no longer able to make ends meet. People told us that they needed a government that would listen to them, and that is exactly what we have done.

Middle-class families simply do not feel as if their lot has improved in the last 10 years, and the facts bear that out. That is why we took resolute action on January 1 to put money back in the pockets of middle-class people. The time has come to look to the future once again with the hope and optimism of the generations that came before us.

Mr. Speaker, you have often said, in your wisdom, that the privilege of being a member of this House lies in understanding the great institution of which we are part and always keeping in mind the people who sent us to Ottawa to work for them. That is precisely what we did when we listened to them and took action in this area.

We must embrace the spirit of our country's founders and build on that legacy by creating opportunities for advancement and mobility that are as vast as those that existed in the past. We have to do so in a way that enables Canada to realize the enormous potential for growth that can come from switching to a low-carbon economy, where clean technologies and economic growth go hand in hand. We already have the keys to that future.

This week, the Minister of Finance had his first meeting with the Advisory Council on Economic Growth, which is composed of eminent experts from around the globe. That committee will work hard to put forward measures designed to promote inclusive, long-term growth in Canada.

That morning, I had the opportunity to participate in that very interesting meeting chaired by Dominic Barton of McKinsey. I should point out that it is the first council with gender parity. I am pleased that our advisory council has as many women as men from all sectors of the economy who talked to us about growth and innovation.

Let us imagine the Canada of the future and identify our strengths, but let us also be conscious of our country's demographic challenges and the fact that the Canadian economy accounts for 2% of the global economy. We must draw inspiration from best practices employed elsewhere in the world if we want to understand how to promote a stronger economy.

We are going to do what we said we would do. As we said with respect to the advisory council, we already have the keys to the future. Yes, we have challenges here in Canada, but we also have tremendous opportunities and a highly educated population.

• (1525)

Our country has vast natural resources. We can count on stability, predictability, and the rule of law. Those features will attract investment here.

As I said, Canadians are among the best-educated people in the world. We rank first among members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the OECD. More than half of all Canadian adults have a post-secondary degree, and everyone here knows that education is the foundation. No society has experienced strong economic development without having made education a priority. That is exactly what we are doing, and Canadians have one of the highest levels of post-secondary graduation.

We are world-renowned for our research and scientific discoveries. We are often on the cutting edge of clean technology, which is becoming increasingly prevalent internationally.

This is important because Canada invests a great deal in research and development. We now realize, however, that we need to do more in the way of marketing. We have to move from research and development into producing a product. Once we have a product, we need a customer, and once we have a customer, we can hope to export our product. That is how we will successfully create economic growth in Canada.

We have an abundance of natural resources that are surpassed only by the ingenuity and diversity of our people. That is also important. I often say that our greatest resource is human capital. We know, and I am sure that all my colleagues on both sides of the House will agree, that the greatest capital we have in Canada is human capital. Canadian men and women have achieved extraordinary things that have advanced humanity.

Government Orders

My colleague, the Minister of Transport, is a great example. He has done extraordinary things for this country. He went into space. He taught an entire generation of young Canadians, myself included, how we could dream big and realize our dreams through excellence. If there is one man who embodies excellence in Canada, it is the Minister of Transport, because not only did he give young Canadians a glimpse into space, but now he is serving his country with distinction as a member of Parliament, like all my colleagues.

Given that we have one of the lowest debt-to-GDP ratios in the G7, we know we can make these wise investments for the middle class. The Minister of Finance has been applauded by the *Financial Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, by Ms. Lagarde of the International Monetary Fund, and by officials at the OECD. They have said that Canada is building its future on a solid foundation.

I will use my last few seconds to say how proud I am to have worked with my colleagues on both sides of the House, listening to Canadians. We drafted a budget that not only works for Canadians today, but also builds on a solid foundation to ensure that the Canada we have today will continue to prosper for decades to come.

• (1530)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to acknowledge my friend from Shawinigan. I am sorry, I mean the hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain. When I see him I think of the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien, who of course was the member for that riding for many years.

I want to assure the hon. member that I hold him in high regard. He is a new parliamentarian, an intelligent, articulate man who works hard. He does not have any good ideas, but I have the utmost respect for him nonetheless.

I want to repeat what he said a few moments ago. He said, “We are going to do what we said we would do.” With all due respect, that is not exactly true because that party was elected on a promise that the tax changes announced in Bill C-2 would be revenue-neutral. Unfortunately, it turns out that there will be a \$1.7-billion deficit. It is not the Conservatives that are saying so, but the parliamentary budget officer, whom the President of the Treasury Board was quoting earlier.

Could the hon. member explain why he says he is going to do what he promised to do, when in fact there is a deficit where the cost should have been nil?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, allow me to respond to my hon. colleague, for whom I also have a lot of respect. He is obviously an experienced parliamentarian and a very smart man.

However, as he said earlier, we do not always share the same ideas, but we do respect each other in the House, so that we can debate. What all parliamentarians want is to be able to exchange ideas.

When I spoke earlier, I said that we had made a promise. We promised to grow our country's economy. One of the key measures in our budget is to reduce taxes for the middle class by 7%, from 22% to 20.5%. That is a significant cut, and it took effect on January 1.

I have met with Canadians and I think they would disagree with my hon. colleague, because these people see how important it is to invest in the middle class and have a government that listens to them and proposes innovative measures to give Canadians more buying power.

I am so proud to have a government that is thinking about the middle class and Quebec families. When we think of the nine million Canadians who are now paying less tax, I am sure that my Conservative Party colleagues would agree that lowering taxes for the middle class is the right thing to do.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, who often fills in on the Standing Committee on Finance, where we discussed this bill.

I heard his speech. As the Liberals have been doing since this Parliament began, he made several references to helping the middle class. Given the testimony that we heard in committee, I think he will agree with me that the term “middle class” is not clearly defined. Officials from the Department of Finance refused to define it. The definitions varied depending on the witness, but no one seems to agree on what constitutes the middle class.

When all is said and done, it seems that the proposed tax cut will not help the middle class. He, as a parliamentary secretary, and I, as an MP, will see our taxes reduced by the maximum amount, which is about \$700. However, the people who work as wait staff in the parliamentary restaurant or child care workers in the Prime Minister's office, for example, will not be entitled to any kind of tax cut.

Someone who is really part of the middle class, as defined by the median income in Canada, earns \$31,000 or \$32,000 a year. These people are not going to get anything. We tried to work with the government to amend the proposed tax cut and ensure that everyone who earns at least \$11,000 could benefit. Under our proposal, anyone who earned the median income of \$31,000 would have received \$200, but they are not getting anything under the government's plan.

I would like my colleague to talk about how the government's measures, which are supposed to help the middle class, are unfair because they only help people who earn \$45,000 or more. Parliamentarians here in the House will get the maximum tax cut of \$700.

• (1535)

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work done by my colleague, for whom I have a great deal of respect. He is a man of experience who always brings an interesting perspective to the committee. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his important contribution to our committee.

Government Orders

Like him, I am a member of the Standing Committee on Finance, together with some other colleagues who are here. We did indeed hear from a number of witnesses who said that the definition of middle class varies greatly depending on the region and the socio-economic context.

I was fortunate to travel to the north. The average salary in some areas is obviously quite different from the average in my riding of Saint-Maurice—Champlain. You will realize that when we take into account all the factors, the middle class is a concept that varies.

This is what we did. The member could at least give us credit for that. We were very clear in the last election when we indicated which tax bracket we would lower. That is exactly what we did. We said that we would lower taxes for the second bracket of the middle class from 22% to 20.5%, which applies to income of approximately \$45,000 to \$90,000. That is a 7% reduction. Canadians chose to elect us based on that.

I understand what my colleague said. He shared his views and we listened carefully at the Standing Committee on Finance. However, on October 19, Canadians chose a different path.

[*English*]

Mr. Arnold Chan (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance not only for his presentation here today but for his excellent work, along with the Minister of Finance, particularly at the beginning of this year, when they went coast to coast to coast around the country under a very difficult timeline to consult with Canadians on what was ultimately budget 2016.

I listened carefully to his presentation with respect to many of the tax measures that are included in budget 2016 and how it would improve the lives of middle-class Canadians. Some of the things I did not hear, which I want to give the parliamentary secretary an opportunity to expand on and are particularly important to my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt, are the strategic investments, particularly in infrastructure, and in particular as it relates to public transit.

We have had some interesting announcements that have taken place in, for example, the Toronto area. I would like to give the opportunity to the parliamentary secretary to further elucidate as to how it might impact my particular region of the country.

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague and say what a pleasure it is to see him in the House. Perhaps I had the privilege of travelling coast to coast to coast, but I recognize my colleague went through a difficult time. It is nice to see him with us, because he is an outstanding member with the respect of everyone in the House. These days, one can only appreciate being surrounded by people like him.

The question brings me back to the first thing the member said, about the humbling experience. We are going about consultations in many different areas, but we did our finance consultation and went from coast to coast in the country, and I had the chance to go to his part of the country. It was one of the most humbling experiences.

To come back to what the member was saying, over the next two years we will invest \$11.9 billion on phase one of our new infrastructure program. This is significant. It is part of the \$120 billion for the next 10 years. This is exactly the type of investment

that is going to help our country with economic growth, but also provide Canadians the necessities in terms of infrastructure. We have inherited a situation where the previous government lacked the necessary investment in our infrastructure, which deprived a number of our communities and our cities of essential infrastructure.

The member was talking about public transit. The investment is going to be \$3.4 billion. In some communities, moving goods and people faster is so important. Traffic jams are not just a nuisance. There is a huge economic cost. Our economists have calculated how much it costs when people are in traffic for one or two hours per day, and they say that making these smart investments would allow us to have economic growth in regions like his.

We heard from many of his people that they wanted us to make investments in public transit. I have been in the cities. We have admitted a number of new Canadians, and because of the sprawling of cities, jobs are here and people are there. There is no connection between the two. I met people who said they could not find people to hire and I met people who said they do not have a job. These investments would help our country to succeed in this century and for the future.

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my political party, I am pleased to speak in the debate on Bill C-2.

As we have seen just now, Bill C-2 contains the initial application of the new Liberal government's financial measures. We recognize that Canadians spoke last October 19. We are true democrats. We respect the choice made by Canadians, and we want the government to respect Canadians.

The first thing that the government and any politician must respect is the commitments made during the election campaign. Unfortunately, in that regard, the least we can say is that this government got elected by saying one thing and is now doing exactly the opposite.

Bill C-2 is the first manifestation, if we needed one, of this sad reality. I said so just now in the question that I asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance. Of course, we are all members of Parliament. However, he spoke as a parliamentary secretary, and I am happy to repeat publicly what I said before: this guy should be in cabinet and not just a parliamentary secretary.

What the member said just now is that, unfortunately, election promises could not be kept. With all due respect to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, he did not answer the question. The Liberal Party made a commitment to bring in tax changes that, it said, would benefit the greatest number of Canadians. It is a point of honour, because it is a cornerstone of its platform. Those tax changes were supposed to be revenue-neutral. However, now reality has caught up with the Liberals: this government is making tax changes that are not revenue-neutral, but rather create a deficit.

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That deficit is \$1.7 billion. The parliamentary budget officer also says so, the very one quoted by the President of the Treasury Board just a few minutes ago as saying that everything is hunky-dory. I presume that the government has great respect for this institution, but this institution says, in black and white, that the tax changes made by the government in Bill C-2 will generate a deficit of \$1.7 billion.

Not long ago, I heard the member say that families are content and that people are happy that money is being put in their pockets. I am quite sure people are happy, but can we afford that? No. When we do that, we must do so realistically, responsibly, and in a balanced way. Let us remember that our government, under the leadership of the right hon. member for Calgary Heritage, put forward measures to reduce taxes, at zero cost. There were 140 such measures in all.

Let us remember the most spectacular measure, taken in the first term: we lowered the GST from 7% to 6% and then from 6% to 5%. We promised to do that, and we did it. Need I also remind the House that years ago, the predecessor of the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain, the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien, made an election promise in 1993 to abolish the GST? He never did abolish it, which led to a by-election to replace the minister, who left.

Sure, tax cuts are nice and changes to taxation are nice, but they have to be made realistically and responsibly, which is not the case with Bill C-2.

This is not the only time the government has made a promise about finances but done the opposite. Changes to the tax structure will cause a \$1.7-billion deficit, and the same goes for changes to family benefits. The Liberal government is acting the same way. It promised that its changes would be revenue-neutral, but reality is catching up with it.

Changes for families, represented by the hon. member for Québec, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, my colleague and neighbour, were not supposed to cost anything. However, they are causing a \$1.4-billion deficit.

Need I remind the House that the financial cornerstone of this government or any government is, without doubt, the budget? What did the Liberal Party say about the budget during the election campaign? It said there would be little wee \$10-billion deficits for three years followed by a balanced budget and that everything would be fine.

The fact is that there will be a \$24.9-billion deficit this year. That is the reality of this government: it says one thing but does the opposite. It promises a balanced budget but ends up in the hole. It says we will have small deficits but ends up with big ones. How are we supposed to trust this government? How can we believe a thing it says?

• (1545)

How can people not be even more cynical about politicians when, unfortunately, the government stands out so distinctly for promising one thing and then doing the opposite?

I am appealing to the government's common sense, and I am inviting it to make some changes and stop living beyond its means. A deficit is a burden for our children and grandchildren. Some will say that this is good for families and children. As I understand it, we

are passing the burden to families and children. That is not a responsible approach.

Some colleagues opposite will say that when the Conservatives were in power, they ran up deficits. When we were in power and the right hon. member for Calgary Heritage led Canada, the country faced the worst global economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Despite this terrible situation, we won the G7 triple crown because we were in power and because the Conservatives had a prudent and rigorous approach to managing the country. We are the best in the world with respect to the three fundamental aspects of the economy. We like to compare ourselves to the best in the world, because that is how we get good. We won the G7 triple crown under the rigorous management of the former government led by the right hon. member for Calgary Heritage. We had the best debt-to-GDP ratio, the best job creation record, and the best economic recovery. That is our government's legacy.

I want to emphasize the best debt-to-GDP ratio. We often hear the people currently in power say that they have the best debt-to-GDP ratio, which makes it possible for them to incur a deficit. It is because of the Conservatives that Canada has the best debt-to-GDP ratio. Had we used the Liberals' approach to managing the country during the economic crisis, we would not be the best. We would be the worst. They are making bad decisions.

I would like to remind Canadians that we left the House clean. We won the G7 triple crown. We had the best debt-to-GDP ratio. We left a surplus. We are not the only ones to say so. When the current government came to power, in November, what was the state of our finances? We had a \$1-billion surplus. I am not the one saying so; the Department of Finance said so.

I got a document out of my desk, but I cannot show it. Why do I have it? I keep it close by because it is crucial to always remember what is fundamental to our political action. We are here to vote on legislation and budgets, but we must always have accurate information.

The Department of Finance indicated in the "Fiscal Monitor", which is published by that department, that there was a \$1-billion surplus for the period from April to November 2015. That has the Conservative government's signature all over it. That is how we left things financially. Unfortunately, the current government is living beyond its means.

I would like to say one last thing about the document I cannot exhibit. I think we have asked for this official document to be tabled at least 50 times. Unfortunately, the government systematically refuses to table a simple document that confirms our sound and good management.

In our view, the best thing for the Canadian economy is clearly wealth creation and job creation. However, wealth and jobs are not created by the government, but by private businesses, our entrepreneurs, our men and women who, through their intellect, enthusiasm, determination, and community leadership, create jobs and wealth. The government needs to be there to support them.

With deep sadness, our entrepreneurs have realized that there is absolutely nothing in the budget to help them. That is our vision.

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The Conservatives believe that to help our businesses grow, markets need to be opened up. I have the great privilege of sitting next to my hon. colleague from the Vancouver area, who was the minister of international trade. For four years, with honour, dignity, and success, he conducted the negotiations on the trans-Pacific partnership, which is providing Canada and Canadian business people with access to a market of 800 million people. It is fantastic.

• (1550)

We are asking the government for assurance that this treaty will actually be ratified and the guarantees offered to our workers across Canada will be honoured, particularly regarding the famous issue of supply management.

In Bill C-2, we see that, unfortunately, that vision is not the right one, from our perspective. That is where the heart of political action lies. What vision do we have for the future of Canada? For us, the Conservatives, it is clear. It must also be said that for the Liberals too, it is clear. In our view, it is not the right one.

We believe that we have to live within our means, that we should not run a deficit in times of prosperity, which is in fact what was said by the Right Hon. Paul Martin, the former prime minister of Canada, but more importantly, the former minister of finance in the Chrétien government. In fact, his memory was honoured, not in the funereal sense, but for his historical importance to our nation, our country, when his portrait was unveiled just a few days ago.

Paul Martin said that in times of prosperity, the deficit must be eliminated and, above all, the debt paid off. That was a vision that we share and that, unfortunately, seems to have faded over time in the Liberal Party. To us, it is clear: you do not run a deficit when the country is prospering. The Liberal government has quite a different vision.

[English]

It is crystal clear. With Bill C-2, we see a government that shares not exactly the same vision, point of view, attitude, or policy as we had under our former leadership for the last 10 years. Let me be clear, in the last 10 years, our former prime minister was very strict on public funding, but first and foremost we left the House clean. There was a \$1 billion surplus at the end of our mandate and also the big three of the G7: the best ratio of debt to GDP; the best at creating jobs; and the best in getting back our economy after the crisis. That is the Conservatives' signature. This is how we left the House. It was a really clean, good House left by the former Conservative government.

However, today what we see is a government that spends too much. It is a government that does not respect the fact that we have to live on what we have, instead of what we wish to have. When we create deficits in that situation, we send the bill to our children and grandchildren, even to those who are not born today. They will have to pay for the fact that today the current government is doing it all wrong and making bad decisions for the future of this country.

It is not too late. Maybe the government will open its eyes and make some modification, maybe. It is not too late. The bill is not yet passed. I can dream. I am a dreamer; not all the time, but I am a dreamer.

We strongly disagree with this attitude. Every party wants to give money to the people. We did that 140 times when we were in power. We reduced the debt, reduced the taxes, reduced income tax, and all that stuff. We did that 140 times in our government, but we did it very responsibly, which is not the case in this bill.

I hope that this House will reject Bill C-2.

• (1555)

[Translation]

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to listen to my colleague.

As he said, we are in the House to listen to one another. I would just like to say that there is one model we do not care to emulate. I am talking about the hon. member for Calgary Heritage, the former prime minister of Canada.

To us, he is not really a role model because he added \$150 billion to Canada's public debt. Hon. members will understand that on this side of the House, we do not really see that as an example to follow.

I listened to my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent with great interest. I noted that at one point he asked rhetorically whether we had the means to help the middle class. His response was no.

I can say one thing. After meeting Canadians from coast to coast, the answer is yes. We do indeed have the means to help and invest in the middle class. The reason is simple. Canada has the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. Now I have a question for the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent

Who is he disagreeing with? Is it the *Financial Times*, which says that Canada is the star of global economic growth? Is it *The Wall Street Journal*, which described our Minister of Finance as someone who is showing other countries how it is done? Is it the parliamentary budget officer, who said the measures in the budget are going to create growth? Is it Christine Lagarde, from the IMF, who sees Canada as an example? Is it the G7?

Among all those who are saying that Canada is on the right path under this Minister of Finance, who got it wrong in his books?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I would encourage my colleague to use caution when quoting articles from foreign news sources, particularly if he is reading what the foreign press has to say about our Parliament and our Prime Minister these days.

Since the member is quoting, I would like to quote from his election platform, which says these changes will be revenue neutral. Would he like to quote that document? That is what I went by, and that is what 35 million Canadians based their vote on. In reality, these measures are not revenue neutral.

Once again, the best debt-to-GDP ratio forms the cornerstone of the Liberal Party's plan. Who is responsible for that? Who enabled Canada to have the best economic performance coming out of the economic crisis? What government made sure that we were the best creator of jobs and wealth in the G7? It was our government. Yes, I am very proud of the legacy left by the right hon. former prime minister, the right hon. member for Calgary Heritage.

Government Orders

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent. I found his remarks very interesting. He is a good speaker. It spices up the debate.

I would like to begin my question by pointing out a comment that he made at the beginning of his speech. He said that when the Conservatives were in power, they made responsible tax cuts. He mentioned the GST. According to the data that I have, the lowering of the GST from 7% to 5% over two years and the corporate tax cut cost over \$16 billion, which completely eliminated the surplus that the Conservatives inherited, even before the recession hit.

The member should be careful about making comparisons that are not quite accurate.

However, one thing he did not mention in his speech that is in Bill C-2 is the TFSA limit. We know that the previous Conservative government wanted to increase the limit to \$10,000. One thing we do agree with in this bill is the decision to bring the limit back down to \$5,500, but to index it. We support this measure because many people think a TFSA is meant to be a place to put money that will generate interest, which will not be taxable. However, the tool can be used for many other purposes, including purchasing shares and all kinds of other financial tools. Capital gains on these tools would ultimately not be taxed.

The parliamentary budget officer estimated that this measure would cost about 0.7% of Canada's GDP in the medium term. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on why the Conservatives always wanted to increase the limit to \$10,000, even though that would have had disastrous consequences for the Canadian economy.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, it is my turn to acknowledge the expertise of my colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, with whom I have had the pleasure of debating several times on RDI. I must admit that I would have to prepare a little bit before going on the air to debate an experienced economist like the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. Overall, I do not think it went too poorly.

I thank my colleague for bring up TFSAs, because I had that topic in my notes, but I forgot to look at them. I would be happy to talk about TFSAs. Once again, the different parties all have different visions, and that is why we are here in Parliament.

We all know that the New Democratic Party is fine with taxes. We think it is much better to lower taxes, as we did with the GST, and put more money in people's pockets to help get the economy moving.

The economy is a key, cardinal value for us. Unfortunately, we know that Canadians are not saving enough money for retirement. The TFSA was a new vehicle that enabled Canadians to save money. Some people did not like it when it was introduced, but it has been so good that nobody wants to get rid of it now. Bravo. Here is where we part ways: we think the TFSA limit needs to be higher. We have to enable people who earn a good living to save money too. We have to make that possible because that is a vision we have for the future. Everyone has their own thinking on that. I know some people think it is not the way to go, but for us, it is a cardinal value. Canadians

have to save money. We created this tool, and we wanted to make it even better.

I am not a millionaire, but I like the TFSA a lot. I save money, and that is a good thing. We all live according to our means, and when possible, if people have no debt, it is a great thing to be able to save.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for his speech this afternoon, and I really respect and honour his parliamentary experience.

[*Translation*]

I do not have enough confidence to speak or ask a question in French.

[*English*]

I will do it in English, if members do not mind.

I want to focus on the debt and the deficit situation. My home province of Ontario is currently experiencing \$313 billion in debt. In fact, the third largest department in the Ontario government is the payment on that debt.

Of course, we all know that many in the former Ontario Liberal government are now running the PMO, so we are just transferring that debt and deficit ideology into the federal government, and obviously access to a bigger piggy bank.

I want to ask my hon. colleague, given his experience in government, what impact significant debt and deficit can have with respect to the impact on middle-class Canadians going forward.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his right and very important question. It is a real issue when we are talking about public money, and we are here to do that. People pay taxes and they want to know what we are doing with them.

When we create deficits, we create debt, and we are shifting the bill to our children and grandchildren, even those who are not born today, and they will have to pay for the fact that we live over budget today.

He talks about his own province. I can talk about my home province too, Quebec. This is a very important bill that we have to pay, a very huge debt. That is why I have been involved in politics for the last eight years. I was elected in 2008 in the National Assembly, and it was one of my cardinal issues for which I fought in the National Assembly and for which I want to fight here in the House of Commons, to be very careful with the debt and especially with the deficit.

Government Orders

My hon. colleague from the Liberal Party talked about our result when we were in office. He said we raised the deficits so high. Yes, but he forgot that in this House we faced the worst economic crisis since the thirties.

That is why we had to make difficult decisions, especially in a non-majority government. In a minority government, we had to make some deals with the Liberals and the NDP, and this is why we had to make that difficult choice. However, the result at the end of the crisis was that we were the best, thanks to the Conservative government.

• (1605)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the NDP finance critic, I am pleased to rise at third reading stage of this bill, which has been debated at length in the House.

From the outset, I want to point out that during the debate and discussions in committee we reached out to the government to ensure that the tax cut promised in this bill was truly for the middle class.

As I said in my question, the middle class is not very well defined. The Department of Finance refuses to define it. We have varying definitions depending on the groups. On the other hand, we can agree that when half the people earn more than us and half the people earn less than us, we are in the middle class. I think that makes a lot of sense.

Those people, who earn roughly \$31,000 or \$32,000 a year, are not getting one cent from the so-called middle-class tax cut promised in this bill. I find that extremely problematic. I mentioned this in my question, but it bears repeating. As parliamentarians, parliamentary secretaries, or even the chief government whip, we are going to benefit the most from this tax cut. We are absolutely not part of the middle class, but we will get a maximum reduction of nearly \$700 because of this promised tax cut.

Someone who earns \$30,000, \$35,000, \$40,000, or even \$45,000 a year will not get one red cent from the tax cuts in this bill. Therefore, when the government says that this bill will help the middle class as promised during the election campaign, that is not entirely accurate. Yes, that was in their election platform, but we all know that people rarely consult election platforms online when deciding how to vote. They tend to rely on what is said in the media, on television, in the news, and sometimes in the newspaper. What people kept hearing from the member for Papineau, who was the leader of the Liberal Party, was not that he would lower taxes for people earning over \$45,000 a year, but rather that he would lower taxes for the middle class.

Those who earn less than \$45,000 a year and consider themselves part of the middle class feel cheated, and rightly so. I am convinced that during the Canada-wide consultations held by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Finance, they probably heard comments about that from people who are not eligible for the tax cut. People have been able to tell from the beginning of this year, since the tax cut took effect on January 1 and can therefore be seen on people's pay stubs.

Since the bill does not really apply to most middle-class Canadians, what could be done? That is where we reached out to the Liberal government at committee. We proposed a measure that would cost roughly the same, but would help a lot more Canadians. Instead of changing the tax bracket beginning at \$45,000, which is more representative of the upper middle class, we suggested lowering the first tax bracket, the lowest level at which everyone starts paying taxes.

Accordingly, instead of lowering the rate from 22% to 20.5% for the second tax bracket, we are proposing to lower the rate from 15% to 14% for the first tax bracket. That will have a significant impact because the same person who sees half the population earning more than they do and the other half earning less, will receive a \$200 tax reduction, whereas they are receiving nothing now. Thus, someone who earns \$210,000 a year and now gets \$200 of the proposed reduction, would instead pay \$70 more.

We have to be careful with slogans. There is no doubt in my mind that, after all the debate, the desire to help the middle class that is constantly being trumpeted by the government is more of a slogan than something real.

• (1610)

If the government really wanted to help the middle class, it would have accepted the proposal, the olive branch that we were extending to the Liberals, in order to ensure that everyone could benefit.

I am sorry to say that this proposal was rejected by the Standing Committee on Finance. It is regrettable because I believe that it could have been debated and probably would have been agreed to. What the government promised during the election campaign, or the spirit of the promise, would have been kept. The whole of the middle class would have received a tax cut. That is not the case at present. It is unfortunate that the government is still trying to make us believe the opposite.

As a parliamentarian, I have to admit that I do not need a tax cut. I want to pay my fair share. I consider myself to be privileged. Why are they insisting that my colleagues and I receive the largest possible reduction? That is a very problematic aspect of the bill, which only has 10 clauses.

We are not fundamentally opposed to the measure to introduce a new tax rate of 33% for income in excess of \$200,000 or to the measure to lower the TFSA contribution limit from \$10,000 to \$5,500. We have supported these measures from the beginning, even before the Liberal Party decided to include them in its election platform. I remember some debates that were held here, in the House, against increasing the limit to \$10,000, and those arguments still hold true today.

Government Orders

The parliamentary budget officer conducted a very important and specific study on this topic. Once again, my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent did not fully answer the question, because he tried to imply that the TFSA is just a money-saving tool. TFSAs are indeed used for this purpose. After people pay their taxes, they deposit money in a TFSA, which then grows with tax-free interest. However, with the limit increased to \$10,000, the TFSA would become a significant tax-avoidance tool for people who have the means to contribute the \$10,000 maximum, as proposed by the Conservatives.

What is the result? The result is that not just money will be deposited into these vehicles. People can also put stocks, bonds, and other financial tools that would often be subject to capital gains tax into those accounts. That money can grow tax-free in these vehicles. We have here a situation where we started out with a savings vehicle and ended up with a significant tool for tax avoidance, which allows the wealthiest members of our society to shelter their money from taxes. That is why the parliamentary budget officer described this measure as potentially dangerous for the public purse.

He estimated that in 20, 30, or 40 years, the money that would no longer be paid to the Canadian government in taxes as a result of this measure could be equivalent to 0.7% of the GDP. The government feels that 0.7% of the GDP is too much to allocate to international aid. However, it does not seem to be too much to give away primarily to the wealthiest members of society, who would use the TFSA to shelter their investments.

That is why we think that the limit of \$5,500 is entirely appropriate. In fact, only 17% of those who contribute to a TFSA and 7% of the entire Canadian population reach that limit. We agree with that measure.

We are not opposed to the creation of another tax bracket, which explains why we voted in favour of the ways and means motion that could not be debated or amended. It has a major financial impact.

However, there is now another important factor to consider and that is the tax cut for the so-called middle class. We are in a situation where that could be changed.

● (1615)

That is the path we chose. We voted in favour of Bill C-2 at second reading specifically because we wanted to try working in committee to get a clearer picture of what this measure as a whole means for the middle class.

Evidence from Standing Committee on Finance meetings shows that, systematically, almost every time I asked a question, it was about this issue. Most of the answers I got were pretty vague with respect to the impact. Some said that, basically, we were right: we would reach many more citizens and taxpayers and help many more people.

The government argues that this is part of a suite of measures that must be taken as a whole. This bill is not a suite of measures. It contains three distinct measures, one of which is very problematic.

If we look at the government's proposed measures as a whole, including the child tax benefit in the budget implementation bill, we see that many members of the middle class will not get a tax cut or any help from this government.

Single people with no children earning \$40,000 a year, which is a fairly large portion of our society, I would say, will get nothing, either from this income tax cut or from other measures proposed by the federal government. An elderly couple earning \$30,000 to \$35,000 in pension income will get nothing, either from this income tax cut or from measures proposed by the government in the budget implementation bill.

A large part of the Canadian population will get nothing, but those people can clearly and accurately define themselves as being part of the middle class. I do not understand that, and the Liberal Party has not provided any explanation, apart from the fact that people elected them because of that, for refusing our offer to work together to help as many Canadians as possible, to help the entire middle class and not just those who are earning up to \$217,000 a year. Those who are earning between \$45,000 and \$217,000 a year will benefit from the bill.

When I go to my constituency, how can I meet with the head of a banking institution, who may be earning \$215,000 a year, and with someone earning \$30,000 a year and explain to them that the former will benefit from it and the latter will not?

I do not know how the Liberal members feel when this question comes up. I suspect they will not be in a hurry to answer it. They are well aware of what kind of reaction they will get from those citizens.

We are in a Parliament that we hoped would be collaborative. I will not rehash yesterday's events, but while the government says that it is willing to listen to our amendments and that it wants to gain our co-operation by working with us, we really feel that it just wants to push its ideas through as quickly as possible, without necessarily paying much attention to the positive effects that an opposition proposal might have.

I would like to have seen Liberal members ask more questions on this issue in the Standing Committee on Finance. However, their questions seem mostly to have been designed to elicit witnesses' agreement with the government's position. The Standing Committee on Finance plays a special role in this Parliament, as do all committees, in fact, which is quite different from the role of the House of Commons.

It is different because, here, we have a somewhat adversarial system, with the government on one side and the opposition on the other. However, committee is the only place where we can call each other by our proper names. We are not members for certain ridings, but rather members, period. Our role, whether on the government side or opposition side, is to make sure that the government is held to account and that the government's proposals are studied, scrutinized, and analyzed in order to ensure that they really contribute to the common good of the country.

Government Orders

• (1620)

We are talking about the current government, but I am not saying that the previous government did not do the same thing. Government members act like cheerleaders to applaud their government's proposals, rather than paying close attention to the detailed consideration of what is before them. Not only does the committee's work suffer, but so does Parliament as a whole, and so does Canadian democracy. This situation does not appear to be getting any better as time goes by, despite this government's commitment to do things differently and ensure that Parliament works more collaboratively.

There are measures that we support, including lowering the TFSA ceiling, which will still be indexed to \$5,500. Combined with the other savings tools, this measure seems good to us. There is also the creation of a tax bracket for higher incomes. Despite the fact that it applies to incomes over \$200,000, it will not be enough to ensure that people who earn \$210,000, for example, pay more taxes, because they will pay less.

We feel that this other measure in Bill C-2 is problematic and fundamentally unfair. Contrary to what the government would have us believe, this measure does not meet a need of the middle class and does not apply to all those who belong to the middle class.

The member for Louis-Saint-Laurent makes a valid argument, even though we did not present it: when people voted for a tax cut for the middle class, they did not necessarily know where the middle class began according to the government's definition, and the government did not dwell on that either. However, if there is anything that was mentioned more often than the \$45,000 threshold from which the cut would apply, it is the fact that this measure would not cost anything.

When the Liberals say that Canadians voted for this measure, we must realize that Canadians voted for their perception of this measure. That perception quite often was created by the Leader of the Liberal Party, who extolled the virtues of a tax cut for the middle class. Unfortunately, this measure excludes a lot of the middle class.

I can assure the House, that I hear my constituents talk about this and that every one of my colleagues has talked to me about it. This has been discussed by committees and also by our caucus.

Although we support the two measures, we fundamentally disagree with the third one, which we tried to amend. The government chose to ignore us. We debated this issue because it is important and it is being talked about in our ridings. We would have liked the government to listen more and co-operate with us. It did not. This morning, we were not expecting to debate Bill C-2 in the House this afternoon. However, we are discussing it again and we will have the opportunity to meet as a caucus to bring this discussion to a close.

Unfortunately, I do not think that was a very good thing for the government to do. People have rather strong opinions in this regard, even though there is still opportunity for discussion. I think that the debate at third reading will be the government's last chance to consider our demands and those of our constituents.

If the government members have suggestions or if they want to make amendments to initiatives other than this bill, which cannot be amended, our door is always open. With regard to this measure, unfortunately, we are being forced to seriously consider voting against the bill at third reading because the government has failed to listen to or show an interest in a large portion of the middle class.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

I completely agree with him about the role of committees, and I am proud that the members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights were able to work together to make 16 amendments to Bill C-14. I hope that that will also happen in other committees.

I understand the demand being made by my New Democrat colleague, who wants to offer a tax cut to a bigger group of people than the one provided for in Bill C-2. However, during the election campaign, the NDP did not put forward any proposal to reduce taxes for those who will benefit from Bill C-2 or for anyone else.

How is it that the New Democrats did not propose any tax cuts for the middle class during the election campaign and now they are demanding that sort of tax cut before they will support Bill C-2?

• (1625)

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

I have been asked this question before, and I answered it when we were debating this bill at second reading. I agree that the government was elected on a platform of tax cuts for the middle class. That was a measure that made headlines throughout the campaign. The public elected the Liberal government. No one can deny that.

Now, if the Liberals promised a tax cut for the middle class, they should truly cut taxes for the middle class. Here in the House, we accept the public's choice, so we should work to improve the proposal that was made during the election campaign. Many more people shared our understanding of this proposal, which is not what has been imposed by the government.

I cannot deny that the platform on the Liberal Party's website proposed lowering the tax rate for the second tax bracket from 22% to 20.5%. However, if you ask people what the Liberal Party promised them, they will say that they were promised a tax cut for the middle class, not a tax cut from 22% to 20.5% for income above \$45,000.

Since the public made its choice on October 19, we wanted to help the government achieve what Canadians were expecting, which was a tax cut that would benefit everyone, starting at \$11,000 in income, and that would have essentially cost the same to the treasury as the measure the government proposed.

[*English*]

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member touched on a really important part of what the budget is about. We on this side of the House have often said that it is actually a Liberal shell game that says the middle class is going to be getting more than what it will. There is no definition of what the middle class is.

Business of Supply

In fact, when it was broken down in a recent *Maclean's* magazine article, David Macdonald, who is with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, said that there are roughly 1.6 billion families making \$48,000 to \$62,000 that will see their tax bills trimmed by, on average, just \$51, and as the income goes up, those earning \$62,000 to \$78,000 will only see a \$117 saving, and there will be a \$521 saving for the average family making \$124,000 to \$166,000.

What is important to understand is those making \$166,000 to \$211,000 will get a tax break of about \$813. That benefits what I would classify as the upper middle class. Everybody in the House is going to be getting a bigger tax break than what I would truly classify as a middle-class family.

I want to ask the hon. member how he feels about this Liberal shell game.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member for Barrie—Innisfil's statement.

David Macdonald also said that those who will benefit the most from the Liberals' tax proposals are families that earn between \$166,000 and \$211,000 a year. According to his estimates, these families would receive about \$813, on average.

Stephen Gordon is a respected economist and is not known for being partisan. We do not always agree with his positions as an economist, but he is respected. He said that people earning \$50,000 in taxable income would benefit much less than those who earn \$150,000 in taxable income, which is not far from what we make here. He even admitted that the NDP is correct. Those with a higher income will receive many more benefits under the Liberal plan than those supposedly in the middle class.

The Liberals do not seem to understand what Canadians truly expect. They said that the second tax bracket, for income between \$45,000 and \$90,000, would be changed. They would be surprised to hear that Canadians thought that would exclude people who earned more than \$90,000, but that is not the case. Those who benefit from the tax cut are all those whose income is above \$45,000, including those whose income is above \$90,000. In fact, in spite of the new tax rate of 33% for income in excess of \$200,000, people who earn up to \$217,000 will be getting a tax cut. However, there is still nothing for someone who earns \$44,000 a year.

• (1630)

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I certainly appreciate my friend's speech. He is doing an incredible job for the NDP as the finance critic. I certainly appreciated listening to his exchange with the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent earlier, where he decisively explained why we are opposed to keeping the TFSA contribution limit so high.

I know the Conservatives are champions for lower taxes, but by going the route of giving more savings room, they might be forcing a future government to either drastically cut services, which usually hurt the most vulnerable in our society, or actually raise taxes. Therefore, it would have a converse effect.

I want to touch on the subject of where the middle class sits. One of the privileges of being a member of Parliament is that we get to meet people from all walks of life. It really is a fantastic privilege to get to meet people from the community. In my area of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, I would say that most of the people I meet would fall into the range of income of around \$30,000 to \$40,000. If they do not have children, they are not going to get anything from this plan. Several of them have correctly noted that, as a member of Parliament, I would get the full tax cut out of this plan. I was not sent to Ottawa to give myself a tax cut. My job was to come here to make life easier for those who do not have as many means.

My colleague has already illustrated the mechanics of this in trying to find the definition of the middle class. I think we exist sometimes in an Ottawa bubble, and I was wondering if he could inform the House of some of the feedback he has directly received from some of his constituents on this matter.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, who is also doing an excellent job in his first session in Parliament. He has really impressed his colleagues so far.

This is an important issue. The questions people ask me most often are about this and the proposed changes to employment insurance. For example, people have asked me why their waiting period has not yet been reduced from two weeks to one. I have explained that the measure is not yet in force. Since the government's platform said that would happen in 2017, that is what I tell them.

However, when they tell me they are still waiting for less tax to be withheld from their paycheques, knowing that this measure is in force, and they want to know why they are not seeing a difference, I am forced to ask them what their income is. In many cases, they earn \$30,000, \$35,000, or \$40,000. I tell them that they do not qualify. Then I ask them if they have children to see if they will get the new tax benefit. Unfortunately, I have to tell single people that they will not benefit.

The problem with making big commitments and big promises is that it creates great expectations. Those great expectations can lead to disappointment for people who thought they would be included. That is what happened to a significant segment of the population with Bill C-2.

* * *

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), I would like to designate Monday, May 30, 2016, for consideration in a committee of the whole of the main estimates for the Department of Finance.

Government Orders

●(1635)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, Air Transportation; the hon. member for Lévis—Lotbinière, Agriculture and Agri-Food; and the hon. member for Saskatoon West, Labour.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

* * *

[Translation]

INCOME TAX ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-2, An Act to amend the Income Tax Act be read the third time and passed.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Mount Royal, who, like me, spoke in French during Monday's debate on Bill C-10. I wanted to make that correction since the hon. member for Outremont misinformed the House about that on Tuesday. In fact, I speak French more than he does in the House. He would contribute more to the quality of the debates in the House if he checked the facts before making unfounded accusations.

I rise to speak to one of our key election promises: the 7% tax cut for the middle class, whose tax rate will go from 22% to 20.5%; the tax increase for wealthier Canadians from 29% to 33%; and the reduction in the TFSA annual contribution limit from \$10,000 to \$5,500.

I commend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and my riding neighbour, the hon. member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain, on his maiden speech. Our ridings meet along a provincial gravel road, Parent Road, where government signs strongly advise the use of CB radios. This border is located more than 300 kilometres north of Montreal, not far from the community of Parent.

Bill C-2 is important to the growth of the middle class. It includes crucial changes to Canada's tax system. The legislative summary of the bill is quite clear:

This enactment amends the *Income Tax Act* to reduce the second personal income tax rate from 22% to 20.5% and to introduce a new personal marginal tax rate of 33% for taxable income in excess of \$200,000. It also amends other provisions of that Act to reflect the new 33% rate. In addition, it amends that Act to reduce the annual contribution limit for tax-free savings accounts from \$10,000 to its previous level with indexation (\$5,500 for 2016) starting January 1, 2016.

These changes will benefit Canadians, so naturally, they are looking forward to them.

I also want to congratulate my colleague from Louis-Hébert on his speech. I rose to reply to him a couple of times, but better members were recognized before me. The life of an MP is complicated.

I would like to point out that the member for Louis-Hébert alluded to the fact that budget 2016 provides for a deficit. He also said that his government was responsible for all of the good things that came out of the last term of office. He is very happy to take credit for all of the positive results, while saying that his team had nothing to do with anything that went wrong.

Investments in the middle class and economic growth for ordinary Canadians are very important to me, the government, and the millions of Canadians who will benefit.

The member for Louis-Hébert also said that the Conservatives left the House clean. That is not completely true. The Conservatives sold the house to pay off the mortgage. They waved the cheque from the sale in the air for all to see before giving it back to the bank to pay the mortgage. The house was not really clean. It was gone. There are now deficits in the middle class, in infrastructure, and in all levels of government.

My colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques is a bit more reasonable. He presented fact-based arguments about our policies. I really enjoyed listening to his speech. I do not agree with him when he says that these tax cuts do not help the middle class. I agree with my colleague from Mount Royal, who asked why the New Democrats did not promise to cut taxes in their platform but did promise to balance the budget.

With the exception of the members of the former government, who still think that they left a massive surplus, even though that is not quite true, I think it is clear to all of us that it would only be possible to balance the budget this year if we used extreme measures, such as austerity, which is a very unpopular policy in any country.

I short, I am not worried about these deficits because they are investments. That is the case with Bill C-2. I would like to give my colleague from Louis-Hébert a little bit of background on deficits. Almost 100 years ago—

●(1640)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I am the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent, not the member for Louis-Hébert, who is a Liberal MP.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Of course. Thank you. We will continue debate.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciate the correction made by my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent.

I want to tell him that it has been a very long time since the Conservatives managed to balance a budget. They had surpluses in or around 1871, 1912, 2006 and 2007. They left surpluses, but they always inherited them from the Liberals. They have not balanced a budget in about 140 years. When he talks about deficits, he is not being quite honest.

I will stop there, but I am interested in hearing the questions from the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the floor.

I would first like to thank my colleague for his excellent speech. He is very attached to his community. I had the opportunity to campaign with him, and I know that he has a good understanding of the concerns of the people in his riding.

Government Orders

In the speeches given earlier, we heard members ask whether this measure affects the middle class. In fact, this measure affects nine million Canadians. Approximately one third of all Canadians will benefit from this positive measure. We are proposing a 7% tax reduction for nine million Canadians. Therefore, I am quite shocked to hear that it is not an important measure that will help all Canadians. More than one third of the population will be affected by a key measure in the last budget.

I would like to ask my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle, whom I consider a good friend, to explain the meaning of the phrase “help the middle class”. How can these people invest in their family and send their children to school or to a summer camp? I would like him to provide concrete examples. I know him, he is a caring man who is really attached to his community.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, the riding of Laurentides—Labelle is huge, and it has diverse economic needs. This riding is a rather poor one. Any assistance for a riding like mine is very much appreciated.

My riding has 43 municipalities, and the poverty rate is rather high. For a long time, there was a lack of investment from the federal government. We are trying to fix that situation with infrastructure spending and tax changes. This is part of a comprehensive plan that will help regions like mine and my colleague's. That is very important to our community.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the middle income tax cut that is supposed to benefit the middle class, actually mostly benefits those on the very high end of income, certainly relative to the people in my community.

People making \$45,000 or less would not benefit one cent from this tax cut. According to the parliamentary budget officer, that is estimated to be 17.9 million Canadians.

I am wondering how the member could actually square that circle to say that this tax cut is good for people in his community who are in need of support, who have low income, particularly for camps and so on. When they make \$45,000 or less, they would not benefit from this.

•(1645)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, it is helpful to have any investment in our community. Any cuts in taxes, for anyone but the wealthiest, are beneficial to us.

It is part of a larger plan that all members have seen in our platform. It is part of a larger budget. There are several more budgets to come before the next election. Everything we can do to help our community will be appreciated and supported.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was interesting that my colleague's other colleague was mentioning how important it is that these tax cuts would help children in his riding go to summer camps and these kinds of programs. I would ask this. Why would the member support eliminating the children's fitness tax credit, the arts credit, and the textbook credit? These are also programs that I know my family relied on a great deal for our children to go to sports and be healthy and active. If that is such an

important issue for this member, why would he support eliminating the children's fitness tax credit?

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, the wonderful thing about tax credits is that we only get them if we pay taxes, so they do not necessarily benefit people who need them most. I did not see a huge benefit to that. We could put those investments elsewhere in the budget and the economy. That is what the government has done and will continue to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to speak to Bill C-2, introduced by our Minister of National Revenue and defended by our Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

Today, we have heard speeches from the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent and the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. What do these four people have in common? They come from three different political parties, but they are all proud Quebecers who are all here to stand up for Canadian interests.

In my opinion, Bill C-2 advances Canada's interests because it helps the middle class.

[*English*]

During the election campaign, I know that people across this House, in their ridings, did a lot of door to door. I personally wore out many pairs of sneakers in this election campaign. The thing I saw the most was that there are people who need help. There are the poorest of people. There is the single mother who is earning \$25,000 a year who needs help. She will be helped by the family benefits, the new child tax allowance that will come to her that will give her a lot more tax-free money. There are the vulnerable seniors who are living on their own. They will benefit, as well, from the guaranteed income supplement going up by 10% for single seniors.

However, there is also that great group of people, and certainly a large number of them in my riding, who are earning between \$45,000 and \$200,000 a year. They will greatly benefit from the middle-class tax cut and the reduction of the second tier tax rates from 22% to 20.5%.

I heard and I listened very closely to the different members of the NDP talking about those who earn less, and I do understand the goal of trying to help everyone. In the future, perhaps there will be another bill that will lower tax rates on the lowest tier. However, for the moment, we have to acknowledge that what is before us will help a lot of people.

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There are people in my riding, and in many of our ridings, who are not comfortably middle class anymore. There are a lot of well-paying jobs that 25 years ago we would have said were well-paying jobs, but the salaries have not increased more than the cost of living, or less, over that long period of time. There may be families of four living on \$90,000 or \$100,000 on a single income, or \$120,000 on two incomes, and they are also struggling to make ends meet. They are struggling to pay for their kids scholastic activities, whether through extracurricular activities such as sports, or alternatively through putting their kids in private schools. They are also struggling sometimes to support aged parents. Members of our sandwich generation have both their aged parents and their kids and are trying to take care of everybody.

It cannot be disputed that this middle-class tax cut for such a high percentage of Canadians, the entire mass of people who earn between \$45,000 and \$200,000, will help a lot of people. It will help a lot of families. It will help a lot of families take a vacation or do something that they otherwise would not be able to do, such as afford a mortgage on a better house.

When I look at the benefits of this law, while I fully understand the argument that there would be a possibility to do more some day, it still merits support.

I also want to point out that I agree with the reduction of the TFSA contributions from \$10,000 to \$5,500. I support the TFSA. I think the TFSA is an excellent vehicle for people to save. I do not dispute that it was a very good measure to put the TFSA into place. However, given the number of people who are using it and contributing more than \$5,500, which is a negligible percentage, and the cost to the Treasury, I would rather reallocate that money to the child tax benefits.

I would rather see more people who are earning less have more to bring our children out of poverty. Let me just point out that for those families who are earning less than \$30,000 with one child under the age of five, that will be over \$5,000 more, tax free, that will benefit that family and perhaps bring a child out of poverty.

• (1650)

Any family earning less than \$150,000 is getting more on the child tax credit portion, so for me, I think that is laudable.

[*Translation*]

I know that many of us have a lot of seniors in our ridings. My riding has a significant number of seniors, not just people who are 65 years old. I know my colleagues agree that 65 is not old nowadays. We are talking about people who are 80, 85, 90, or older. My grandparents and my parents' oldest friends did not move to retirement homes at 65, 75, or 80. They want to stay in their own homes.

The budget that we passed this year will enable more people to stay in their homes.

There is a problem in my riding. Two of our seniors' homes are going to close.

[*English*]

They are one block apart from each other. We need to put more money into social housing, particularly social housing for seniors.

Many members share these problems where they also have in their ridings seniors' homes that are closing, not enough new space for social housing, and people on a list that lasts forever when they are trying to find a way to stay in their communities. Some of the measures that we have taken this year are favourable to that.

I understand and appreciate the arguments on both sides. I am not here to attack anybody's economic record or anybody's economic plans. I only asked the question to the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques to point out that it was not something that the NDP promised in the campaign, that they wanted the lower bracket to be cut. However, I still understand and I respect that argument in the same way I respect the Conservatives' argument that the TFSA should stay at \$10,000, but in the end result, what we would ask all the members to look at is the fact that I do think, on balance, Bill C-2 is a good law and we should all support it.

If I may digress for just one second, I just want to say that today after question period I was very proud of the fact that members of this place came back to reality. We had a few days that were really unpleasant here where the tension could be cut with a knife. I came to federal politics, as some members did, from municipal politics, which was not partisan, and we never had things like that happen.

At committees we work with each other really well, at least we do at the justice and human rights committee where people from all parties work together in respect. I would love to see that continue to happen in this place. Everyone here is committed to it and what I learned most from yesterday's incident was that I have a personal obligation, and we all have a personal obligation, to remind our colleagues that we want to work together in respect.

I think this afternoon, where people had to come up with speeches at the last minute, impromptu, was a perfect example of respect. I just want to again thank everyone for the way they have acted this afternoon and I hope it continues.

• (1655)

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments from my hon. colleague across the way. I too came here and I have offered respect throughout the six months we have been here, time and time again. There are times for jabs back and forth and it is for the most part friendly, but yesterday's incident was unacceptable.

The respect has to go two ways. The actions we have seen, and I am not talking about the motion but I want to talk about the comments at the tail end of my hon. colleague's speech, those actions do speak louder than words.

Would he not agree that perhaps the opposition has not seen the level of respect that we would expect from a government, from a leader in the past week, with Motion No. 6 originally being tabled and perhaps closure being levelled in terms of debate? Again, actions speak louder than words and respect is ensuring that there is debate, not putting a draconian motion in place.

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We have moved beyond the incident yesterday as we have mentioned earlier, but again, that respect has to go both ways. Will the hon. member agree and commit to being a leader on his side so that whether it is committee work or if he is witnessing anything on his side that he will take a stand and make sure the opposition has a say, has a word, and that we are not irrelevant, as was shouted across the floor numerous times over the last week, and indeed, that we do have a voice?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Speaker, boy, did my digression lead away from Bill C-2.

Let me say that I do commit to the idea that we should all be showing respect for each other and we should be talking to the people in our own parties and our own caucuses when they are not showing respect. When it comes to heckling, when it comes to actions that do not become us, all of us need to be leaders within our own caucuses. I commit to doing that and I hope the hon. member does the same.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to be debating Bill C-2 after what has gone on this week. I do not think debate on Bill C-2 is going to make the highlight reel on CPAC; let us not kid ourselves.

I appreciate the comments the member made and I understand the position he is coming from. For us in the NDP, we have had a problem with what the Liberal definition of “middle class” is. When we look at the median income in Canada being \$31,000 a year and median is very much defined as the middle point in a set of numbers, so it is about halfway. A tax cut in that range is not giving people any kind of relief. The member mentioned that we have many people in Canada who are suffering and I think he would agree with me that the gap in incomes is widening. People on the higher end of the spectrum are getting more and people on the lower end are getting less.

Economists are pointing out that couples with a combined income of \$250,000 a year would gain \$1,100 in tax cuts, while a couple with a combined income of \$75,000 a year, which is pretty average, would gain zero to \$4. I would like the member's comments on the fairness of that.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate my hon. friend and the constructive suggestions that he advances. I appreciate the use of the word “median”. One of the first books I ever read was about mean, median, mode, so I do know what median is. I would point out that in the Liberal Party platform there was a very clear explanation about where that middle-class tax cut would be. Whether it is the best or not the best, that was what the platform said. That is what I ran on in the election campaign: \$45,000 to \$90,000, 1.5%.

In my riding many people earn more than \$200,000 and our tax plan was not very popular with many residents, but I said to them, as I said to myself because before I came to this place I also was a high-income earner, that we need to give back. I agree completely that we need to find ways to help the people earning less than \$45,000 as well. I think we are doing it with the family allowance, with improvements to EI, and by investing money to help people find jobs and training. I agree that on the tax issue with respect to the lowest tax bracket, that is a subject—

● (1700)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind hon. members that while you are talking, if you do not mind, especially when we are getting close to the end, if you would keep an eye on the Speaker I will let you know that we are running out of time, so I will not have to cut you off like I just did. My apologies to the hon. member.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I would never ignore you, Mr. Speaker.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this important bill. I will say at the outset that it is good to be back talking about the business of the nation again. As much as the conversation that happened this morning needed to happen, it is very good to be back to the things that Canadians are most concerned about, which is the economy, jobs, their well-being and that of society as a whole.

There are some significant concerns about the bill that we need to draw particular attention to. We in the opposition have been doing that over the course of this debate, and we will continue to do that. We will continue to do our job, which is to highlight problems with government legislation, suggest improvements, and to do so in a fair-minded and constructive way.

Just by way of some review, the legislation that is before us would make two different changes to our tax system.

The first change is that it would make a modest reduction to some middle-income earners' taxes while introducing a tax increase for those at the high end. However, this change would not be revenue neutral. Rather, it would significantly add to the deficit, and over a number of years, significantly add to the debt. That is one of the changes.

The second change that the legislation would make is that it would do away with the higher cap on tax-free savings accounts that was implemented by our previous government and did exist. There was a limited opportunity for Canadians to save at that higher level. However, it would now cut back on the amount that Canadians can save tax free.

I want to start my remarks here by talking about one specific aspect of this issue, and that is the issue of equality. Members on all sides of the House are concerned with equality. They want to ensure that everybody has a shot. They want to ensure that everybody in Canada has a similar shot at doing well. That is really a principle that we all come at perhaps from slightly different perspectives and slightly different emphases.

On its face, it seems that the bill was advanced with an eye to equality. However, if we dig into the details, I think there are some serious problems from an equality perspective in terms of the actual impact that the bill would have. I would describe it as maybe a first-year undergraduate version of equality. It may be well-intentioned but it would not actually have the desired impact.

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Let me start by saying that for me the most important measure of equality is something called “intergenerational earnings elasticity”. This is a measure of the likelihood that a person will perform at the same economic level as their parents relative to the rest of society; in other words, it measures movement between different income quintiles. Therefore, if I come from a high-income family and was almost certainly going to have a high-income family myself, that would be bad from an equality perspective using this metric of intergenerational earnings elasticity. This does not mean that we want people who are well off now to do worse. Rather, it means that, relative to each other, we want to have a society where people who had lower incomes can move ahead of others, and vice versa, a society where opportunity is more fluid and not fundamentally shaped by who our parents are or where they came from.

This information is tracked, and there was a report that came out in 2012 that looked at intergenerational earnings elasticity. What was interesting to me, and made me very proud as a Canadian, was that we performed particularly well. As I recall, we were fourth place in the world overall. It is interesting that we actually performed better than stereotypically more left-wing countries, and we performed better than stereotypically more right-wing countries. Where we were at, and likely where we have been over the course of our history, was in a relative sweet spot by providing not only necessary social programs but also allowing a healthy level of free enterprise that allows for economic growth and allows people to pursue economic opportunities that perhaps their parents did not have. That is one measure, intergenerational earnings elasticity. It is a measure on which we have historically done very well.

The other question might be the performance of the middle class. I have quoted this before. This is a quote from the former secretary of state, now presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, when talking about the Canadian middle class. She said:

● (1705)

Canadian middle class incomes are now higher than in the United States. They are working fewer hours for more pay, enjoying a stronger safety net, living longer on average, and facing less income inequality.

There are two ways of measuring the performance of the middle class. Well, there are more than two, but these are two significant ones: looking at median income and median net worth. Between 1999 and 2012, the median net worth of Canadian families rose by 78%. That translated to more than a 50% growth in net worth for every income quintile, except the lowest, which still grew but did not grow as much. Therefore, when it comes to median net worth, we are doing very well.

Median, by the way, is typically used as a measure of the middle class performance. It is better than an average measure, because an average metric can be skewed upward by groups who are doing particularly well, but median gets us closer to looking at those actually in the middle and how they are doing.

There was a study that came out in *The New York Times* in 2014 that showed real inflation-adjusted median income—I am talking about median income now—went up by more than 20% since the beginning of the last decade. By the way, at the same time, median income was roughly stagnant in the United States.

When it comes to intergenerational earnings elasticity and the performance of the middle class, Canada historically has done and is doing very well. That is important by way of context, because it seems that some members in the House have this revolutionary spirit when it comes to our economy—that we need to upend the way our economy functions now as it just is not working—but if we look at any credible measure of equality or middle-class performance, Canada is in a strong position. That does not mean we cannot do better, but we should recognize where we are and recognize the risks of dramatic or revolutionary changes in our fiscal policy.

I want to say, on the equality front, that at the same time as being very much concerned about equality, I and most of us on this side of the House would strongly reject the politics of envy. We would reject the idea that we should in some way regret the success of those who are doing well. The focus of public policy should be on helping the poor and the middle class. We do not need to focus on improving the lot of those who are well off, but we should not regret the fact that there are some people doing well.

Those people are important members of our community as well, and very often those who are well off are contributing to the community in ways that they are able to do, in particular, because of their wealth or position. That is an important point about equality. It is not about trying to level down those at the top. Rather, it is trying to build up those who are in the middle and those who are particularly struggling. Those are some underlying equality principles, at least as I understand them.

Let us, then, talk about specific measures in Bill C-2 and how they would impact equality. First, we know that this bill would provide a tax cut that would not impact those who are worse off. The tax cut specifically targets those who are making between \$45,282 and \$90,563. It would not have any impact on those who are making less than \$45,000 a year, and that could, by the way, be families with a family income of \$70,000 or \$80,000 a year, if the earnings are shared by a couple. There would be absolutely no impact of this tax reduction.

Canadians should know that and reflect on the fact that this has a somewhat strange view of middle class. To get the benefit of the middle-class tax cut, one has to already be doing reasonably well. This certainly does not do much for those who, in the Prime Minister's oft-repeated phrase, are seeking to join the middle class.

However, more than that, this bill would lower the limit for putting money into tax-free saving accounts. The data suggests that many people who have low and middle incomes make very good use of tax-free saving accounts.

● (1710)

More than half of those who max out tax-free savings accounts are making less than \$60,000 a year, so reducing the power of this vehicle is the only thing in the bill that impacts those who are making less than \$45,000 a year, who arguably need the help the most.

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This is a rather strange concept of equality, and although taxpayers get a benefit when they start to make \$45,000 year, we know the way the tax system works here that they benefit from this change to a greater extent the more of that income tax bracket they cover. Therefore, people who are making just over \$90,000 like this policy the most. They are going to benefit the most. A family making \$180,000 is really in that sweet spot for earning the tax cut. Again, there are newer, higher taxes when they hit \$200,000. However, a family income approaching \$400,000 could actually be significantly to the positive because of these tax changes. Therefore, that is a bit of a strange approach if the objective is equality.

The impact on people making less than \$45,000 a year with this tax change would be they would be losing the opportunity to invest in a tax-free savings account. They would be losing the opportunity to save in the same way, to the same degree, for their future.

One other point I want to make about tax-free savings accounts is that there are specific things within them that are pro-equality. The impact of TFSA's is greater for those who are lower income. This is because of the relative value of an investment in a tax-free savings account versus an investment in an RRSP. These are different savings vehicles. Canadians who are doing financial planning will potentially choose between putting money in a tax-free savings account or in an RRSP. The difference is that if they put their money in an RRSP they get a tax deduction at the beginning, but then they pay tax on it when it is converted to a RRIF and withdrawn from the RRIF in the future. On a tax-free savings account they have to pay tax on that money up front, but then they can accumulate interest tax free.

They are different kinds of vehicles, and I would obviously encourage Canadians to save their money in one or both of these vehicles. However, the greatest value of an RRSP is for those who can achieve a significant tax differential between the taxes they would have paid on that money. They are not paying tax on it during their working years, but then they do pay tax in the future. Therefore, if they are paying income tax at a very high rate and they can reduce that amount during their working life, but then during their retired years they can draw on that and pay a much lower rate of tax, that is really where the greatest value is in an RRSP.

On the other hand, Canadians who are making more modest incomes, who are not in the higher tax brackets, are more likely to opt for the use of the tax-free savings accounts because they do not get the same benefit from that differential. This explains why Canadians of modest and lower incomes clearly use tax-free savings accounts at very significant levels.

The argument has been used on the other side that it is only well-off people who have \$10,000 they can save. I am not convinced that is true. There are many modest- and low-income Canadians who make significant sacrifices, not necessarily because they have to this year, but because they believe it is important for them to put money aside for a rainy day or for opportunities for themselves and their children in the future. There are many Canadians who do that, and that is often a very good choice to make.

With regard to the specific point about the difference between the tax treatment of TFSA's and RRSP's, if very wealthy Canadians have \$10,000 sitting around, they are probably more likely to put it into an

RRSP than in a TFSA. The point is that, as much as well-off people have more money to save, TFSA's are a specific vehicle that is specifically providing a greater relative advantage to those who are of modest and lower income. Therefore, it is important to understand that TFSA's are in many ways inherently more of an equal or pro-equality type of saving vehicle.

• (1715)

As we talk about equality, I think it is important to say, as well, that inherently debt is regressive; that is, accumulating deficits and debt is inherently a measure that is not conducive to income equality because it assigns costs to future generations, to children, people who do not have economic means, at least not right now. It says to the next generation, "Here is more money that you have to spend, in addition to dealing with your needs, because we expect you to be working hard to take care of our needs". It assigns the cost of present needs to future generations. That, obviously, is not conducive to equality.

Telling my three-year-old daughter, Gianna, that she has to pay for social programs that I want to use today is not something that those who are genuinely seeking equality should be doing. We should be paying for present needs with present dollars.

It is worth underlining, in terms of the measures of Bill C-2, that because the tax changes do not balance out, this is going to cost a significant amount of money over the next few years. We are going to be spending billions of dollars simply because of the poorly thought-out hole in the government's budget. It is telling that the Liberals said, during the election campaign, that it would be revenue neutral. They told Canadians that their tax changes would be revenue neutral and, in fact, they were not.

Maybe this is because they were not being truthful; but maybe it is that they just did not know, because they got the numbers wrong. I think either of those is pretty concerning. This is a problem. I think it is a problem that the government should have remedied, and could still remedy.

I think it is very clear, looking at the bill, that there are significant equality problems with it.

Measures that would have been more pro-equality would have been to look for ways to lower taxes for those who are at the bottom.

I have to say that this is exactly what the previous Conservative government did. We lowered the GST from 7% to 6% to 5%. That is the tax that everybody pays. That is the tax that all Canadians pay. We also lowered the lowest marginal tax rate. That was one of the important tax changes we made. We made necessary EI reforms, which would have allowed reductions to EI premiums over the long term. It is no coincidence that all of these taxes that we sought to impact were taxes that had the biggest impact on lower-income Canadians. Cutting the GST, cutting the lowest marginal tax rate, and undertaking those necessary steps that opened the door for lower EI premiums were necessary measures to help those, in particular, who needed the help the most.

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If we then compare that with what the government would do in Bill C-2, there is a clear difference. When I sometimes hear members opposite, even the Prime Minister, say that the previous government was helping those who are better off, it is always telling that they never mention a specific tax measure. I have never heard the Prime Minister cite specific tax measures or tax changes we made, in the context of that claim. That is because all of the tax changes we made were really with an eye to those on the low- and middle-income end of things.

Of course, we did cut business taxes, as well. Those are the kinds of measures that help job creation. They help low-income Canadians. They help unemployed Canadians get jobs.

I think it is important, when we think about social equality, to dig deeper into it than just the slogan. It is important to look at how we are performing as a country, first, to look at measures like the performance of our middle class, to look at things like intergenerational earnings elasticity, and then say, "This is where we are now. Now, how do we improve our performance?"

Bill C-2 would not improve our performance. By getting rid of TFSAs and by denying any benefit of these tax changes for those who are less well off, the bill is not pro-equality. We could do better. There are better measures that we could be proposing, and I would hope to see the government be willing to make some of those changes.

• (1720)

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, I have a lot of respect for him. He is always a very good speaker, and has presented one view, obviously his view, of the issue.

I would just like to get back to people. We all represent people. Let us be honest, I do not know too many people in my riding who can save \$10,000 in their TFSAs after having to spend money for their children, their mortgage, and their cars. That data is not just in my riding. We have found that only 6.7% of Canadians have contributed the total amount to a TFSA.

We were elected to help the many, not the few. That is why we have made the change to the TFSAs. Indeed, when we look at the middle class, I do not believe middle-class families can save up to \$10,000 in a TFSA. I have yet to meet anyone who has ever been able to contribute the maximum amount to a TFSA.

I have heard my colleagues saying that paying for present needs with present dollars makes sense. Obviously, what we are looking at in this budget is investment in our future. Canadians told us two things: help them and our families, and grow the economy. We have reduced taxes for the middle class, and we are making investments for the future.

I have listened to the member many times, and I know he would understand that when we look at infrastructure, it is multi-generational.

How can the member say that this measure is not helping many Canadians, when we are helping nine million Canadians, about one-

third of our population in our country, by reducing middle-class taxes?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his kind words and obviously there is a lot of meat there.

Let me go in reverse order and see if I can get to the second point. I already addressed the issues around TFSAs.

On the question of infrastructure and whether it is good for the next generation, infrastructure is used over an extended period of time. The issue is that the next generation will have to invest in new infrastructure. We will never stop needing to spend money on infrastructure.

We have to spend on it now for the future, but future generations will have to continue to spend money on the maintenance of existing infrastructure and on new infrastructure. The analogy made by some is, well, would we not go into debt to get a mortgage because we would use the house for a long time? If we had to buy the equivalent of a house every year, we probably would not take out a mortgage. If we took out a mortgage, we would not have money to buy the house in the next year and the next year after that. That is kind of where the analogy falls down.

The other issue with the government's budget, and I encourage Canadians to look at the chart on page 91 of the budget which lays out what is infrastructure, is that the debt the government is accumulating here, much of it is not for traditional infrastructure. It is not for building that bridge or road that will exist for a long time. Child care is even included on the page 91 grid on infrastructure.

Obviously taking care of children is important. There is a role for government in providing direct support to parents for child care, but I do not think—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I know we have 10 minutes for questions and comments, but I do note there are other members interested in posing questions.

The hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

• (1725)

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly agree with the member that any debt spent on infrastructure really should follow an economic framework of whether it makes our society more productive. It should not just simply be money out the door, and a hope that we will see a proper return.

Could the member maybe discuss the importance of ensuring there is good value for taxpayer money, and maybe give some thoughts about what things he will be looking at as the government moves forward on its plans in this area?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I will try not to take up the rest of the 10 minutes with my response. Members know me not to be too verbose in the House, I am sure. I heard the member for Winnipeg North laugh at that, which is particularly funny.

Private Members' Business

With regard to the point about getting taxpayers value for money, it is particularly important, when we talk about something being infrastructure, to ensure that it actually is infrastructure. It is not because there are not important things that we should spend money on that are outside the category of infrastructure, but because there are specific economic arguments that one could make for deficit in the context of infrastructure that simply do not apply in other cases. The government is spending far more this year in terms of its deficit than its total spending on infrastructure. Therefore, it is pretty clear that there is a disconnect here. Again, as I was saying as we wrapped up, child care just is not infrastructure.

I want to quickly come back to the parliamentary secretary's question about lower income people not having money to put in their TFSAs. Again, I think some Canadians who are on the lower income end work very hard to save that much. It may not be most who can approach that maximum, but even someone who would have saved \$6,000 or \$7,000 a year would be losing out because of reducing the cap. More to the point, those wealthier Canadians, as I explained in my speech in some detail, are more likely to use RRSPs as opposed to TFSAs for a saving vehicle. We should do everything we can to expand TFSAs precisely because of the sort of differential positive impacts on those who are in the middle and lower income end.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that I was not laughing at him. However, it is with pride that I stand today to comment on Bill C-2, in a special shirt with a unique-looking tie in celebration of Ukraine heritage.

The fact is that this is an implementation bill that ultimately will see thousands, in fact, millions of Canadians get a tax cut. I say it in that fashion, because the Conservatives who I have known over the years, generally speaking, vote in favour of tax cuts.

The types of tax cuts we are giving are going to Canada's middle class, such as teachers, firefighters, factory workers, and health care providers. They are part of Canada's hard-working middle class, and they would be getting a substantial tax cut, hundreds of millions of dollars in tax cuts.

Could the member explain to all those middle-class workers why the Conservative Party is voting against giving them a tax break? The member should recognize that the Conservatives are also voting against giving a special tax increase to those who make in excess of \$200,000. This bill would ensure more income equality. Why would he vote against it?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, I always appreciate the interventions from my friend across the way.

Let me be clear that this is a tax change. It is a tax cut for some and an increase for others. However, the government is not clear on who the "some" and who the "others" are. It is like robbing Peter to save Paul without a great degree of clarity about which one is Peter and which one is Paul. Those making less than \$45,000 a year, who are more likely to use TFSAs, would be worse off under this measure. Future generations would be worse off under this measure.

We are all going to vote on this at some point, and the parliamentary secretary needs to be clear about who the benefits go to. Someone making \$100,000 a year and not using tax-free savings

accounts is a bit better off. If people are in the middle of that bracket using a TFSA, then they are either worse off or neutral. However, if someone is on the low end, then one would definitely not be better off.

When we have these kinds of tax changes, reducing some and raising other brackets, we need to have a clear idea of what we are doing. We need to have a clear idea of why, rather than simply shifting things around perhaps, arguably, just for the sake of shifting.

● (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

LIFE MEANS LIFE ACT

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC) moved that Bill C-229, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts (life sentences), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-229, which would amend the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act. Before I outline my reasons for bringing this bill forward, I want to make a few general comments, primarily for the members of the opposition who, I am sure, when speaking to this bill, are likely to say that it is just another approach to legislation by a hard right-wing Tea Party Conservative member.

However, I supported Bill C-14 at second reading and in all likelihood will support the bill at third reading. I will be supporting Bill C-16 because I believe all Canadians should be treated with equality and, frankly, it is the motivation behind proposing this legislation, which I will explain in a moment.

I am sure we can all agree that Canada has a reputation as a peaceful country of compassionate neighbours who live in relative comfort and security. We are fortunate that as a country our crime rates are low and we are generally able to walk our streets without fear. However, we must also acknowledge that there are some in our country who seek to do harm. There are some individuals who do not respect our values of peace and compassion. These individuals seek to harm others and make us feel unsafe in our homes, on our streets, and in our communities.

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In our country, we perceive that people are innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, and that principle should never change. However, when someone is proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt of heinous crimes such as multiple murders or murders which are so brutal that they upset us to even hear about them on the evening news, that person must be seriously punished for his or her actions. When a life is taken in such a manner, the families and loved ones of the victims are in essence given a life sentence with no chance of ever seeing that loved one again.

In the past 10 years, the former Conservative government introduced and passed over 60 substantive pieces of legislation to help keep criminals behind bars, to protect children, to put the rights of victims ahead of criminals, and to crack down on drugs, guns, and gangs.

I want to highlight some of the former Conservative government's justice accomplishments. They include the Serious Time for the Most Serious Crime Act, the Tackling Violent Crime Act, the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights Act, the Tougher Penalties for Child Predators Act, the Safe Streets and Communities Act, the Abolition of Early Parole Act, and the Drug-Free Prisons Act.

The most serious offence in the criminal code is murder. First degree murder, a murder that is planned and deliberate, carries a mandatory penalty of life imprisonment with an ineligibility of parole for 25 years. Murders that are not planned and deliberate carry the same penalty where they are committed in certain circumstances, including where they involve the killing of a police officer or sexual assault.

Through previous legislation, the former Conservative government strengthened penalties for murder, including eliminating the faint hope clause, which allowed a murderer to apply for parole after 15 years, and enabling consecutive periods of parole ineligibility for multiple murderers so they would no longer receive a sentencing discount.

Today, I am introducing the life means life act to ensure that the most heinous criminals would be subject to mandatory life sentence without parole. The life means life legislation would ensure that offenders who were convicted of heinous murders and those who were convicted of high treason would be imprisoned for the rest of their natural lives with no access to parole. This would include murders involving sexual assault, kidnapping, terrorism, the killing of police officers or corrections officers, or any first degree murder that would be found to be of a particularly brutal nature.

The life means life act would amend the Criminal Code to make a life sentence without parole mandatory for the following crimes: first degree murder that is planned and deliberate and that involves sexual assault, kidnapping or forcible confinement, terrorism, the killing of police officers or corrections officers, or conduct of a particularly brutal nature; and high treason.

• (1735)

The bill also gives courts the discretion to impose a sentence of life without parole for any other first degree murder where a sentence of life without parole is not mandatory, and second degree murder where the murderer has previously been convicted of either a murder

or an intentional killing under the Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act.

The law allows a criminal serving life without parole to apply for exceptional release after serving 35 years. This application would be made to the Minister of Public Safety and the final decision would rest with cabinet. The family of the victim would be able to provide input before any decision. This is consistent with the traditional approach of granting clemency and addresses legitimate constitutional concerns.

I recognize that some of my colleagues will object to this bill. They will say it is wrong to lock up someone for life because the person can be rehabilitated. To them I say, no amount of rehabilitation can bring back the victim of a murder. No amount of rehabilitation can bring back the stolen birthdays, holidays, and special moments in that victim's life. No amount of rehabilitation can bring back that victim to his or her family.

I believe Canadians will largely agree that some crimes should result in the murderer never walking free again. The victims of these murders deserve nothing less. As I said at the outset of my remarks, some of my colleagues will say this is just another Conservative tough-on-crime bill. Well, I am a Conservative and this does fit the definition of tough on crime. Similar laws already exist in the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia. These governments have found similar measures to protect victims and their families.

To those who would call the bill another Conservative tough-on-crime bill, I would say to them that they are right. As mentioned earlier, when in government, our party introduced a series of measures to restore the balance between the rights of the criminal and those of the victim's family. I believe this bill is the final piece of the Conservatives' efforts to ensure that the scales of justice in the future are never tipped in favour of those who commit heinous crimes at the expense of the family of the victim.

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for the hon. member.

He indicated that the bill is designed to ensure that those who commit the most serious crimes do not walk the streets. We already have a mechanism for that. It is called the dangerous offender designation. Perhaps he could explain why that is inadequate to address the problem he seeks to address through this private member's bill.

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Also, there is a provision in the bill that allows for an application to the Minister of Public Safety after 35 years and for a determination to be made by the cabinet as opposed to the current system which has that designation made by trained professionals at the Parole Board. We do have an eminently qualified cabinet, but what is it about the Parole Board that makes it uniquely unqualified to deal with the most serious cases?

Mr. Ron Liepert: Mr. Speaker, on the first question relative to a dangerous offender, it seems to me that it is easier said than done to declare someone a dangerous offender. I have seen numerous situations where application has been made to have someone deemed a dangerous offender and it has been unsuccessful. This is pretty straight and clear as to what the rules would be, what the direction would be to the courts. Having it written in law is more fair to the victims' families and for that reason, I believe the bill is warranted.

Relative to the Parole Board, one of the things in determining how special circumstances would apply, the elected official, the Minister of Public Safety, and ultimately the cabinet, are responsible to Canadians. They are elected by Canadians and they have a responsibility to Canadians. I am not trying to say that the Parole Board does not work well and does not take all considerations into account, but at the end of the day, the Parole Board is not reportable to anyone. In other words, board members are not elected by Canadians. I would prefer that it would be those who are elected by Canadians who would make the special circumstances exception.

• (1740)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech even though I do not share the values or the opinion he expressed.

I will ask him a question. Considering that the Supreme Court declared several of the Conservative laws he referred to in his speech unconstitutional, why is he introducing such a bill?

Why is he bent on taking that approach when it is clearly not working?

[*English*]

Mr. Ron Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I suppose that if we believe in something, we do it, and many of us on this side of the House do believe that this is the type of legislation that is required.

There may have been certain circumstances where particular legislation may not have been deemed constitutional by the Supreme Court. That should not stop us from doing what we believe Canadians elected us to do, and that is to bring in legislation about which we feel strongly. In this particular case, through a private member's bill, I feel very strongly about protecting the rights of victims' families who have gone through a traumatic experience with a crime of heinous nature.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for all the work he has done on his private member's bill and how hard he has worked on bringing this forward.

However, judging by some of the comments from our colleagues across the floor, I think they are missing the point. This is something we are trying to put forward for victims' families.

I would like my colleague to talk about the impact on the families of the victims because they have to go through the parole process time after time, and it forces them to relive the nightmare. The bill would protect them from having to go through the nightmare of losing a loved one again and again. Could he please talk about the impact of not having to go through that parole process?

Mr. Ron Liepert: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague because that is exactly what the bill would put to rest to a large degree for the families of victims.

We see it happening every day. We see how traumatic it is when the family has to go through the court process and provide victim impact statements.

I have not, thankfully, had to be involved in this kind of situation, but I can imagine how difficult that must be to have to face that particular situation and sometimes continue to relive it and maybe face the criminal in terms of the parole process. The bill makes it very much an end decision, so that the families of victims can move on with their lives and not have to worry about going through that process time and time again.

• (1745)

Mr. Sean Casey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-229, which aims to change the law concerning life sentences for the most serious offenders. Bill C-229 proposes mandatory and discretionary sentences of life without parole for certain murders. I will not be supporting this bill.

Bill C-229 is nearly identical to former Bill C-53, the life means life act, which was introduced by the previous government on March 11, 2015. That bill died on the Order Paper with the dissolution of Parliament.

The bill would change the existing criminal law in three ways.

First, it would make imprisonment without parole mandatory for high treason; for planned and deliberate murder if committed during a sexual assault, kidnapping, or terrorism offence; where the victim is a police officer or correctional officer, or if committed in a particularly brutal way.

Second, the bill would provide judges with the ability to impose a life sentence of imprisonment without parole for any other first degree murder, as well as for any second degree murder where the offender was previously convicted of murder or of an intentional killing under the Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act.

Finally, the bill would amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act to provide that an offender sentenced to life imprisonment without parole may apply for an executive release by the Governor in Council after having served 35 years in custody. If released by the Governor in Council, the offender would be subject to conditions similar to parole conditions and the offender's sentence would continue to be administered under the jurisdiction of the Correctional Service of Canada and the Parole Board of Canada.

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We agree that public safety is of paramount importance; however, I am not convinced that the measures contained in the bill would actually result in increasing public safety. Our government made a commitment to use evidence in our decision-making and there is precious little of it which stands to support this bill.

The amendments contained in Bill C-229 would be unprecedented in Canadian law. They are also, in my view, unnecessary. I agree that the most serious offenders, murderers, should be dealt with accordingly by the criminal law. I can also confidently say that the most serious offenders, in fact, are dealt with accordingly by the criminal law.

Our judiciary and the Correctional Service already possess the tools necessary to ensure the most serious offenders will not be released from custody, specifically in the form of a dangerous offender designation. This bill would seek to limit the discretion of our judiciary and the Correctional Service. That is not something I can support.

While it is true that some individuals may eventually be released from prison, this would only happen after their application has been carefully reviewed by the Parole Board of Canada. In addition, those who are released have lifelong restrictions placed on their liberty and may be re-incarcerated if they breach a condition of their release. I believe that our current system works effectively and I have confidence in the ability of the Parole Board of Canada to make appropriate decisions, taking into account all relevant circumstances. Therefore, I question why these changes would be required.

Indeed, for that group of offenders who, under the current regime, would benefit from rehabilitation and gradual reintegration into society, Bill C-229 would require them to stay in jail longer. This bill only favours punishment for punishment's sake and does not meet our other sentencing objectives, including, for example, rehabilitation. I do not believe that Canadians would accept such an approach.

I also have concerns about the constitutionality of this bill, and I am not alone in this view. Stakeholders, including the Elizabeth Fry Society, have raised questions not only about the bill's constitutionality, but also whether its measures are even required. Our government has indicated repeatedly the importance of respecting the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and ensuring that our work is consistent with it. Supporting this legislation would not be in keeping with that commitment.

It should be noted that the Liberal Party has consistently opposed the measures contained in this bill, including when it was introduced as the former government's Bill C-53.

● (1750)

At that time, we noted our objection to the proposed introduction of a new regime that would require an offender to submit an application to the Minister of Public Safety for executive release by the Governor in Council after serving 35 years of their sentence, rather than to the Parole Board of Canada.

Others raised similar concerns about Bill C-53, including the Canadian Bar Association and the John Howard Society. These stakeholders were of the view that Bill C-53's proposed measures, which are replicated in Bill C-229, would not improve public safety

and that there is no evidence that offenders convicted of serious crimes are paroled unjustifiably.

Some stakeholders, when discussing Bill C-53, also noted that excessively long periods of incarceration that eliminate the prospect of offender rehabilitation are destructive to offenders' physical and mental health, and fail to properly balance the principles of punishment with those of rehabilitation and reintegration. These principles are a core part of our corrections philosophy. Nothing in Bill C-229 would address these concerns.

To be fair, some stakeholders may support the objectives of Bill C-229, if they believe it would protect society by keeping violent or dangerous criminals in custody for longer periods. However, as I have already said, the most serious offenders who would be caught by this bill would already be unlikely to ever be released, given the public security risk they pose.

I would also like to point out the concerns that I have with respect to the impact that Bill C-229 may have on indigenous peoples. As members know, the government has recently put forward Canada's new position with respect to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Persons.

The government has made clear its commitment to change the relationship between Canada and the indigenous population. We know that there is an overrepresentation of indigenous people in federal custody, for a multitude of reasons. I am concerned that Bill C-229 would do nothing to address this problem. I do not believe we should be advancing initiatives such as Bill C-229 at a time when crime rates continue to decrease and the overrepresentation of indigenous peoples in prison continues to persist.

The government has signalled its intention to comprehensively examine the current state of the criminal justice system, and I am hopeful that this issue will be examined thoroughly. It is an issue which demands attention and, more importantly, action.

I urge all members to oppose Bill C-229. Its proposals are ideologically driven, not supported by available evidence, and would do nothing to improve public safety. It would further limit the discretion of the judiciary and is not the kind of legal reform we need in this country.

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise here today. It is always a pleasure to represent my constituents, the people of Jonquière. I am always proud to speak in the House of Commons.

Issues that affect my region's economy are especially important to me. We talked about this a lot earlier. Unfortunately, the government is dragging its feet on many files, and this includes protecting jobs in the forestry sector. Our farmers are still fighting against diafiltered milk. We have yet to see any measures to improve access to employment insurance, for example in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, since we have a two-tier system.

Today in the House we are debating Bill C-229, which amends the Criminal Code and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act.

Let me be very clear: the NDP will be opposing this bill at second reading. It reminds us once again of the many reasons why Canadians sent the previous government packing. This is a bill that seems to have been written on the back of a napkin. It in no way reflects reality.

Instead of spreading misinformation and vote-seeking propaganda, the Conservatives should tell Canadians the truth. Under the current system, the most dangerous offenders who pose a risk to public safety never get out of prison.

We believe in evidence-based policy. Any reforms made to the sentencing regime should focus on improving public safety, not on political games.

The Conservatives have been talking about this bill since 2013, but waited until just a few months before the election was called to announce its introduction at a flashy election-style event. That same day, a Conservative member sent out an email to raise funds and add to the list of Conservative Party members. The subject line of the email was “Murderers in your neighbourhood?” This is another example of the troubling use of the politics of fear by the party that was in power at the time.

The ironic thing about the Conservatives is that they are always the first to want to talk about safety in our communities, but in the last three years, the Conservatives cut RCMP expenditures by millions of dollars. Not so long ago, the commissioner of the RCMP said that they had exhausted their budget and needed more money. That is where investment is needed: in the RCMP and public safety.

I believe that Canadians expect better from politicians. Major issues demand our attention, such as setting a decent minimum wage of \$15 an hour and providing better access to employment insurance by making it accessible to everyone in every region.

There is work to do on pay equity and restoring home mail delivery. More resources need to be given to public safety, including the RCMP. Bill C-51 needs to be revisited and the order in council for Bill C-452 on exploitation and trafficking in persons needs to be signed.

Instead, the Conservatives would rather continue to introduce biased bills. Public policy must first and foremost be based on facts, and the objective of such policies must be to keep the public safe, not to win political points. We need to give our public security agencies more resources. We need to take action. We need to invest in prevention in order to prevent crime and help offenders reintegrate into society.

A brilliant lawyer named Michael Spratt said, and I quote:

Throwing away the key is an admission of failure. It amounts to admitting that our prisons are warehouses, that rehabilitation is a lie, that the law that holds us together as a society is still the law of the jungle — an eye for an eye. It's the politics of despair.

● (1755)

I cannot give a speech about crime without thinking of the victims. Today, my thoughts are with all the victims, particularly the victims of crime. Some of them may be watching right now. Too often we forget the impact of crime on their lives and on the lives of their families, particularly when someone is killed. The NDP has

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always cared about victims and that is why we think it is so important to implement truly effective policies to keep the public safe.

The Conservatives should do a bit more research before introducing bills. In the current system, the most dangerous criminals who pose a threat to public safety never get out of prison. That is why any reforms made to the sentencing regime should focus on improving public safety and increasing financial resources, rather than on unconstitutional bills.

My opposition colleagues should know that it is up to the Attorney General to ensure that the laws that are introduced by the government are constitutional. However, once again, the Conservatives are introducing a bill that will more than likely end up being challenged in the courts. Many of their bills, some of which were mentioned today in the House, have already been deemed unconstitutional by the court.

I wonder whether my Conservative colleagues respect the principle of constitutionality and the separation of powers. We live in a democracy, but I all too often have the impression that they do not really believe it.

I will come right out with the question and it is up to them to answer it. Do they believe that it is important for parliamentarians to introduce bills that are constitutional? I will give them a chance to answer this question, which I believe is a very simple but important one.

In my view, it is essential that we put forward public policies that are based on facts and comply with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and our Constitution.

● (1800)

[English]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House to support Bill C-229, introduced by my colleague the hon. member for Calgary Signal Hill.

Bill C-229 recognizes that there are some crimes that are so serious and heinous that the only appropriate sentence is life imprisonment without eligibility for parole.

It is a truism that anyone who is convicted of murder has committed a deplorable act worthy of severe sanction. At the same time, it is also a truism that not all murderers are equal, yet under the Criminal Code all persons convicted of first degree murder are treated equally.

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Proportionality is an important principle in sentencing, yet under the Criminal Code no allowance is made for proportionality when it comes to those convicted of first degree murder. If we take someone who plans, deliberates to commit, and commits a murder, that would be the classic case of first degree murder. That person, under the Criminal Code, would face a life sentence with the possibility of parole after 25 years behind bars. Then if we take someone who not only plans and deliberates to commit a murder but in the course of committing that murder commits other serious crimes, such as crimes of domination, under the Criminal Code that individual would be subject to the same sentence notwithstanding the presence of aggravating factors.

In order to maintain public confidence in our justice system, it is important that the punishment fit the crime. Bill C-229 seeks to enhance public confidence in our justice system by rationally providing a more severe sentence for the most serious of crimes, including the most serious of first degree murders.

There are some who say that, quite frankly, Bill C-229 is not charter-compliant. While I acknowledge that there are arguments in favour of that position, I would submit that, in looking at the case law, Bill C-229 is very likely charter-compliant. While there is not sufficient time in the relatively short time that I have to speak to this bill with respect to the case law, I would note the Luxton case of the Supreme Court of Canada.

In that case, Luxton, who was convicted of first degree murder and sentenced to life imprisonment without eligibility for parole for 25 years, appealed and challenged his sentence. He challenged his sentence on the basis of section 7 of the charter, which deals with life, liberty, and the security of the person, and section 9 of the charter, which deals with arbitrary detention, and section 12 of the charter, which deals with cruel and unusual punishment. In a unanimous decision of the Supreme Court, Luxton's sentence was upheld. Not only was it upheld, but the Supreme Court pronounced that it is within the prerogative of Parliament to treat the most serious of offences with the appropriate degree of severity in order to maintain a rational sentencing regime. That is precisely what Bill C-229 provides by rationally providing a harsher sentence for the most serious of murderers and other criminals.

I should also note that, in the Luxton decision, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized that the Criminal Code provides sensitivity to each individual offender. Bill C-229 also provides sensitivity to each individual offender inasmuch as it provides that anyone who is convicted and sentenced to life in prison without eligibility for parole does have an opportunity to apply for executive parole after 35 years.

•(1805)

There may be certain case where, even in the most serious of crimes, parole is appropriate, but only after an extended period of incarceration, and rationally a longer period of time, having regard for the particularly serious nature of the offence that the individual would have been convicted of.

What Bill C-229 does is that it ends this circus of mandatory parole reviews every two years for the most serious of first degree murderers.

Right now, if an individual is convicted of a first degree murder and thrown in jail for life without eligibility for parole for 25 years, after 25 years, they may apply for parole. If their parole application is turned down, every two years there is a mandatory parole eligibility review. Bill C-229 puts an end to that. It puts an end to families having to go every two years to these hearings where the horrors of the crimes inflicted upon their loved ones are relived, no matter how unrepentant the killer may be, and no matter how unsuitable for release the killer may be.

There are those who say that Bill C-229 is just too tough. I say, tell that to the victims' families. Tell that to Sharon Rosenfeldt, whose son was brutally murdered by Clifford Olson. Ms. Rosenfeldt supported Bill C-53. She supports life means life, and in so doing she has said, after almost 40 years, the impact that the crimes by Olson has had on her and the Rosenfeldt family never go away. They live with that family every single day.

Indeed, the sentence that Olson imposed on the Rosenfeldt family, as Rosenfeldt said, is tantamount to a life sentence. I say, then, so too should the sentence for the killer be a life sentence. Very clearly, in some cases, life must really mean life.

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 today to address what I know is an important issue in the minds of many individuals in dealing with the broader issue of crime.

When I look at Bill C-229, I see a flashback to the Conservative government. I know a number of the Conservatives who are here today will reflect on Bill C-53. I can recall there was a great deal of fanfare about Bill C-53, because it fit the Conservative mould and their tough-on-crime approach to politics.

An impressive image was just given to me. However, it is something that has been portrayed on numerous occasions from the Conservative Party. I will not attempt that image, but it is consistent with Conservatives. They like to cater to that group of individuals by saying they are tough on crime.

I wish the Conservatives would develop that same attitude in being tough on preventing crime, at which they have failed. If we talk to the people we represent, we will find there is a general feeling that the Conservatives missed the mark in making our communities feel safer. To me, that is really what we should be looking for when we bring in private members' bills.

However, this private member's bill is a regurgitation of a government tough-on-crime approach. After all, who is going to oppose convicting felons who have killed several people, the Clifford Olsons of society? There is not very much public sympathy, even from me, toward those individuals. However, it is that imagery that really concerns me.

When I was on the opposition benches and the government brought forward legislation, I argued that government needed to play a stronger role in dealing with preventing crimes from taking place in the first place.

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Last night, I was talking to my daughter, the new MLA for Burrows. Today was her first day in question period, and she chose to talk about the issue of crime. She wanted to highlight what she believed was important in dealing with crime in the communities.

In the door-knocking that we did together, both in the federal election and the provincial election, we realized very clearly, as I have over the years, that we could talk about education or health care, but there was a common issue for people, no matter what political party or candidate they were inclined to support, and that was their concern about crime and safety in their communities.

As an elected official for the people I represent, one of the first things I look at in government legislation or in an opposition private member's bill is whether the legislation will have a positive impact on making the communities and neighbourhoods in which we live a safer place to be.

However, when I look at the legislation before us, the parliamentary secretary to the minister was quite accurate when he talked about the issue of designated dangerous offenders, which is already addressed in our system for the Clifford Olsons and others who have that designation. Therefore, in good part, the private member's bill before us becomes somewhat redundant, not completely but somewhat.

● (1810)

The bill would not do anything to discourage crime from taking place on our streets. At least I do not believe that it would. I would be interested in hearing from the sponsor of the bill whether he believes that there would be less crime as a direct result of the legislation.

What I thought was interesting in the bill is the fact that the Conservatives are aware that when we say "life for life", there is a constitutional component or a charter-related issue with regard to making that sort of proclamation and putting it in the form of legislation. Would it be challenged in the courts? The short answer to that is, yes, it would be challenged.

What was the Conservative Party's idea to prevent that from taking place? It said that after I believe it is 35 years, then the individual can then appeal it, not to the Parole Board but to the Government of Canada, in particular, the cabinet.

In terms of the fact that the individuals on the parole boards have the expertise, I am fairly confident in their abilities and so forth. That is the reason they have actually been appointed to parole boards. That is why we have parole boards, because they offer a sense of professionalism and expertise that members of a cabinet or members of Parliament might not necessarily have, collectively anyway. They may possibly have some contributions toward that expertise. However, in terms of the whole review process, is there more confidence in the cabinet or a review panel of professionals?

After 35 years of incarceration, because that is in essence what the private member's bill is alluding to, then they would be able to go to cabinet. I do not think that is the best way to go. I can understand the politics of making that suggestion, just like I can understand the politics of why I believe we have this particular private member's bill before us today.

I do not know if it is out of frustration that the private member has in terms of the government's failed attempt to materialize on the bill. I am going to assume that it is, that we have certain members of the Conservative caucus who believe that the government's inability to pass Bill C-53, or to get the work done that they were hoping to get done on Bill C-53, was in fact incomplete. Therefore, this is that regurgitation in the form of a private member's bill.

We know and appreciate the efforts of all members and the time and energy they put into bringing forward private members' bills. I do not want to take anything away from that, because I recognize that on all sides of the House there is a high sense of commitment to the process of bringing forward a private member's bill or motion, and I do respect that.

However, I would try to highlight, in the best way I can, to the sponsor of the bill but also more broadly to the Conservative caucus as a whole, that, at the end of the day, if we want to make our communities safer places to be, they need to refocus that image they are trying to portray of just purely tough on crime. I, too, believe in consequences for crimes, and I suspect that all members do. From the perspective of being tough on crime, there needs to be a consequence when someone commits a crime, but at the end of the day, I think what we want to see is how we can prevent crimes from taking place in the first place.

● (1815)

These are the types of initiatives I would like to see more debate on in the chamber. That is one of the reasons that I support the federal Liberal budget and the measures it is taking to improve the quality of life for all Canadians.

At the end of the day, I cannot support this private member's bill. I think it has missed the mark, and it should be refocused on something entirely different.

● (1820)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am not going to say that I am pleased to rise this afternoon to discuss Bill C-229, but rather that I am surprised to rise in this Parliament to be discussing a bill that has been brought forward from the last Parliament.

It is unexpected to see what was clearly a political showpiece, introduced by the Conservative government just before the last election as Bill C-53, reintroduced into the House. It shoots some holes in one of the arguments I used to make, having been the NDP public safety critic for the last five years, that these bills tended to come from the PMO. Clearly, this time they cannot come from the PMO. They are coming from some other place and the former PMO.

It is also surprising, because this tough on crime agenda that the member for Calgary Signal Hill introduced, endorsed the tough on crime agenda idea. This is an agenda that has been rejected by many jurisdictions in North America that have gone down this path. It was rejected by many U.S. states, including the State of Texas, which was probably the poster child for tough on crime agendas. It realized that these kinds of bills do not work.

The former U.S. attorney general, Eric Holder, said:

Private Members' Business

...statistics have shown — and all of us have seen — that high incarceration rates and longer-than-necessary prison terms have not played a significant role in materially improving public safety, reducing crime, or strengthening communities.

I am also surprised because I thought it was pretty clear that this tough on crime agenda was rejected by Canadian voters at the last election.

As I said, as the NDP public safety critic in the last Parliament, I had the task of opposing the raft of so-called tough on crime bills that made up an agenda for the last government. I am surprised to see the member for Calgary Signal Hill donning this cloak of tough on crime as if it helps to promote his bill, which it does not. However, it does clearly situate the bill among that sea of bills that the Conservatives introduced that had common characteristics.

These characteristics are that they had a certain popular appeal because they were directed at horrible crimes, or at deservedly unpopular criminals, a common characteristic that gave a false impression of how our criminal justice system actually works. In fact, they are bills that were largely unnecessary. They have a common characteristic in that they are singularly ineffective at improving public safety. Finally, they often had the common characteristic of claiming to serve the interests of victims. As someone who taught criminal justice for 20 years and worked a lot with victims and victims' families, I know that what victims' families say they want is for no one to go through what they have gone through ever in the future.

The last characteristic that almost all of these tough on crime bills have in common is that they are almost certainly unconstitutional. Cases are now working their way through the judicial system that will invalidate most, if not all, of these bills adopted in the previous Parliament from the tough on crime agenda. There were harsher sentences, mandatory minimum sentences, barriers to parole, or even in the most baffling case, the retitling of pardons as record suspensions and increasing the barriers to getting a pardon for those who had been rehabilitated and were trying to reintegrate into society. They increased the barriers to getting a pardon, which would allow them to get a good job, return to the community, and support their families. This whole sea of laws are now in the process of being struck down.

I know that the Minister of Justice has launched a review of the entire Criminal Code, which will also address all of these tough on crime bills that resulted either from private member's bills or from the government's omnibus crime bills.

What we saw recently, in April, was that the Supreme Court of Canada struck down two portions of the tough on crime agenda. It struck down mandatory minimums of one year for drug offences, and struck down the provisions that take away the right of those who serve time before being convicted and sentenced to get additional credit for that time served. It was just 10 days later that the B.C. Court of Appeal also overturned mandatory two-year minimum sentences for drug trafficking for those under the age of 18 or in places frequented by youth.

● (1825)

I will turn now to the actual provisions in Bill C-229, which are really life without parole for murder when associated with certain

other offences or which involve certain victims, or murders which are carried out with special brutality, or high treason.

The very title of the bill, life means life, is false. It really distorts what goes on in our criminal justice system. Those with life sentences, even if they are released from the institutions, which most are not, remain under supervision for the rest of their lives and remain under restrictions even if they are paroled. A life sentence in Canada does mean a life sentence under supervision.

As I said, with those who are convicted of first degree murder, we heard talk about families having to go through the application for parole again and again, but they do not start that process for 25 years. Those convicted of first degree murder most often have a 25-year period before the parole thing kicks in. At minimum, they are going to have a 10-year period. That is a bit of a distortion of what actually happens to families in the cases of these most serious crimes, but not in the cases of some minor crimes, I will concede.

There is an irony also in the bill in its content. The Conservatives were very intent on removing what used to be called the faint hope clause, former section 745.6 of the Criminal Code, which allowed those convicted of the most serious crimes who had received a life sentence with no eligibility for parole for more than 15 years to request a hearing to allow them to have a parole hearing. That was seen as very effective by those who work in the corrections system.

The Conservatives in 2012, through a bill from the Senate, Bill S-6, repealed that faint hope clause, yet it comes back in this private member's bill as after 35 years, admittedly longer, but it does restore a version of that faint hope clause. I find that ironic.

If it should ever be passed, I believe that the courts will find the bill unconstitutional on two grounds. One, it would be arbitrary in that what is the penal purpose? What purpose is served by the bill? I submit that there is no penal purpose being served by the bill, because as I said, those who commit these most serious crimes are almost never released. Two, it would probably be declared unconstitutional as cruel and unusual punishment.

I know the member for St. Albert—Edmonton said he believes it is constitutional, but we can cite a very large number of legal scholars, Isabel Grant from UBC being one, and Debra Parkes from the University of Manitoba as another who would differ quite strongly with him. Of course, so does the trend of the recent Supreme Court decisions and the B.C. Court of Appeal decision, and a year before, the decision of the Ontario Court of Appeal, which I forgot to mention, which overturned aspects of mandatory minimum sentences involving firearms.

The real impact of the bill would be to ensure that those convicted of these admittedly terrible crimes serve longer times in institutions, but we know from what happened in the United States that this has no impact on public safety, and note that in Canada we now have a murder rate which is at its lowest since 1966.

What it would do is create a management problem in our prisons. Those who think they are never going to get out have no incentive to engage in rehabilitation programs and they have no incentive toward good behaviour. I am going to quote what Don Head, the commissioner for Correctional Service of Canada said on this:

As the proposed legislation would lengthen the incarceration period for some offenders, it's possible that it can reduce incentives to rehabilitation and good behaviour, potentially compromising institutional security as well as the safety of my staff and other inmates.

We have to be very careful about creating a situation which would endanger the safety of our correctional staff who already work in situations of great stress and also that of other inmates.

In conclusion, of course, I will not be supporting this private member's bill. Instead, I would like to see the House deal with provisions that would provide greater opportunities for rehabilitation, an addiction treatment in prisons, greater access to pardons, and all those kinds of things that might help us avoid these kinds of crimes in the future.

• (1830)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would posit that there is not a single airport in Canada that is more tightly or effectively regulated by its local government than the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport.

A strict noise limit is in place. A strict number of landing slots is available. A strict morning and evening curfew is in place. Nav Canada ensures that more than 90% of all approaches to the airport are over Lake Ontario. Contrast this to Pearson airport or Montreal

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airport at Dorval, where many of the final approaches are over densely populated areas, and large aircraft can land 24 hours a day.

Quite frankly, with his tweet ending any possible expansion of the Billy Bishop airport, the minister succumbed to the very worst type of not in my backyard politics. Of course there are always community concerns with any change to an airport's profile, but it is government's role to put in place the conditions for this type of initiative to succeed through stringent regulation or investment, rather than to quash it.

Unfortunately, the Liberals have opted to be the party of no rather than the party of how. I would also like to remind everyone that the federal government is just one of three signatories to the tripartite agreement. While it does have veto power, I would suggest that it has the least skin in the game when it comes to the future of the Billy Bishop airport.

The other two signatories of the agreement, the City of Toronto and the airport's operator, PortsToronto, have far more interest in the future of this airport.

If the parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister is so sure that Toronto City Council would never allow the expansion of the airport, why did he have to order the Minister of Transport to pre-empt its process? Unfortunately, this Billy Bishop tweet was merely foreshadowing more of the Liberals' "it is my way or the highway" behaviour.

With Bill C-10, we have once again seen the federal government act with great haste to pass legislation, while the Government of Quebec and the Government of Manitoba are telling Parliament to put the brakes on this legislation.

When it comes to acting in the best interests of their constituents, I am saddened that the entire Liberal GTA caucus has chosen to remain silent and stand behind the will of a vocal few.

We should not be surprised. With the member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley voting against Bill C-10 at second reading because he truly believed it was not in the best interests of his constituents, voting in support of it at report stage, and then indicating that he would vote against it at third reading, we know who controls the party behind the scenes.

That member will vote for what he believes is in the best interests of his constituents only when he can be assured that he will be outvoted by a large majority, and his vote has become of negligible consequence. Some good that will do.

My question is very simple. Will the federal government withdraw its veto on the future of the Billy Bishop airport and allow Toronto City Council to have a free vote on the future of its island airport?

Ms. Kate Young (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am responding again to the question asked by the hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek regarding the government's position on the former proposal to amend the tripartite agreement among the federal government, the City of Toronto, and PortsToronto.

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As noted previously, the proposal would have permitted the use of any capable jet aircraft, not just the Bombardier C Series, and allowed for the extension of the runway. As has been discussed before, in November 2015 the government determined that it would not agree to the amendment of the tripartite agreement to permit jet aircraft and extend the runway. As also stated before, the decision regarding the tripartite agreement and Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport was intended to strike a balance between commercial and community interests, environmental and cultural challenges, including the evolution of the Toronto waterfront.

Again, it has been suggested that Bombardier will not be able to carry on unless the amendments are agreed to. Once again, it is misleading to say that the only issue when examining the proposed amendments to the tripartite agreement was the impact on Bombardier. The government decision to not reopen the tripartite agreement was based on the needs of the city's residents and of those who live in the vicinity of the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport.

The government, however, has faith in Bombardier and its products. It has been repeatedly stated that the Bombardier C Series is an excellent aircraft, a world-leading aircraft. It will not rise and fall based on a decision concerning a single airport. It does not need a decision to permit it, and only it, to fly to one specific airport. Not only would that be inappropriate in any circumstances, it would fly in the face of the multitude of factors and considerations that must be assessed and examined when airport expansions are being proposed.

The C Series can fly into most of the airports in the country and around the world, and it is gaining more and more opportunities to do so. The C Series aircraft will soon be in commercial service and represents a notable step forward in commercial aircraft development and aviation.

As noted previously, the order received from Air Canada will help not only Bombardier, but the airline and Canada's aerospace industry in general. As also noted, it will be entering commercial service soon with Swiss airlines. Swiss airlines has said on its website that the first flight will occur in mid-July of this year. Other deliveries have also been announced.

However, the most noteworthy announcement in the last month is that Delta Air Lines has placed a significant order for the C Series aircraft. It was announced in late April that Delta had ordered 75 C Series aircraft, with an option for 50 more, numbers that would make it the largest operator of this remarkable aircraft.

It does not seem to me that the sound decision to not amend the tripartite agreement has harmed Bombardier's sales. The aircraft continues to bring in sales, and when it is seen in commercial service and its promise is turned into action, I am confident more sales will be the result.

• (1835)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to note that in both the debate about Bill C-10 and the decision by the minister to not approve the lengthening of the runway, members have continually referred back to Bombardier. I appreciate the member's affinity for the Bombardier C Series aircraft. Like her, I look forward to the aircraft entering into service with Swiss airlines later in the year and seeing first-hand how the aircraft operates.

If the member truly does believe that overwhelming local opposition exists to the future expansion of this airport, why will she and her government not let the process continue and let Toronto City Council have a vote on it? Is she afraid of Toronto City Council making a decision that the member for Spadina—Fort York will not agree with?

Ms. Kate Young: Mr. Speaker, the government is very aware of the issues raised several times recently by the hon. member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek. The government believed in November 2015, and it still believes, that when making a decision about expanding an airport, the potential impact on one aircraft manufacturer cannot be examined in isolation. The effect on the local residents must be considered.

In addition, the government still believes in Bombardier's ability to continue to develop the C Series aircraft and to make new and innovative products that will enhance its standing in the international aerospace community and benefit the Canadian economy. The recent orders Bombardier has received for the C Series show clearly that this is a great aircraft and many airlines want to use the aircraft at many airports, not just at the Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport.

• (1840)

[*Translation*]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this evening's adjournment debate and to hear the views of my hon. colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary, on a question I asked the minister in the House. I was disappointed in his answer, but 35 seconds is not a lot of time.

I would like the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to outline the Liberal government's overall views on the importance of having agricultural policies based on a vision for the future. Canadian farmers make their decisions based on the short-, medium-, and long-term policies that are in place. It is truly very important for the future of Canadian agriculture that decisions on our farms be made on the basis of policies that will be in place for the long term.

We signed the trans-Pacific partnership, which is currently on the table and waiting to be ratified. That agreement is very important, especially to western Canada, because it will set the long-term parameters for international trade.

We also have a free trade agreement with Europe that also needs to be ratified. Indeed, it will give Canadian products additional access to markets, and this includes Canadian beef, grain, and fruit. We are fortunate to have supply management in Canada. Canada is the only country in the world that enjoys this duality: we export agricultural products, and our products are protected by supply management. This broad vision is very important.

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Nevertheless, I am still quite worried about the responses this government has been giving us on agriculture in recent months. I am convinced that my colleague opposite also has some concerns. I know that he is a farmer himself and that his son has taken over his farm. If he has his own vision of farming in Canada, perhaps I could get more answers from him.

However, I do not want my colleague to forget the issue at hand, which is diafiltered milk. Fifteen days ago, we were told it would be resolved in 30 days. Our dairy farmers are really at their wits' end. They are desperate and are even talking about coming to see us here on the Hill in two weeks, after our break. It should not have to get to that point. These people have asked the government to take action. The government has some possible solutions. Even during the NDP opposition day, however, the government did not share any possible solutions with us. This uncertainty about future policies is creating a great deal of insecurity among farmers.

We cannot build a strong country and a strong agricultural system if we do not know whether the current government is committed to Canadian agriculture. We absolutely have to have a vision for the short term, the medium term, and the long term. That said, the long term is really important. We need to maintain the conviction that Canadian agriculture is of paramount importance in Canada and the rest of the world too. We can do without a lot of things, but we cannot do without food and quality food products made by people right here at home. These people work morning to night, seven days a week, 365 days a year to give us the most important thing: good food.

Here in the House, the least we can do is answer their questions and enforce the policies in place.

I hope that my colleague will be able to provide some answers.

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Lévis—Lotbinière for raising this important issue.

I am disturbed by the fact that the question comes from an opposition member who co-chairs a leadership campaign that is in favour of abolishing supply management.

Supply management provides a degree of stability that guarantees a fair market and income security for thousands of families. How can the member say he wants to protect dairy producers while at the same time being in favour of abolishing the system that provides them with income security? That is completely unacceptable.

Unlike the opposition member, our government believes that the Canadian supply-managed sector is critical to ensuring a strong agricultural sector and a prosperous economy in Canada.

Yesterday, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and I held productive meetings with dairy producers from across the country. We will continue to meet with the industry as promised as we work together to come up with a sustainable, long-term plan that will help the industry adjust to market concessions in the Canada-Europe free trade agreement.

In February, at the Dairy Farmers of Canada annual meeting, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food announced an investment of

\$1.75 million in research for the dairy sector. This investment will support research by our scientists at Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in two key areas. The first is in increasing the quality of Canadian forages to help increase milk production, and the second is in understanding the role of dairy fat products, including their impact on type 2 diabetes.

That brings the total federal investment in the dairy sector to \$13.75 million over five years. Last month, we brought down the federal budget, which includes important measures to support Canada's agricultural sector, including sectors under supply management.

The budget includes investments of \$30 million over six years to support advanced research in agricultural genomics to mitigate the biological threats to agriculture associated with climate change. It also includes investments of \$41.5 million to support the rehabilitation and modernization of agriculture and agri-food research stations and laboratories in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Quebec.

The government is also working on developing an approach for additional investments in agricultural science and research, informed by the review of federal support for fundamental science. These are all excellent ways to measure the prosperity of Canada's agriculture industry.

The budget also mentions Canada's commitment to swiftly ratify the Canada-European Union economic agreement. This agreement will open access to markets in the European Union for key Canadian agricultural exports, such as maple syrup, beef, pork, grains, fruits and vegetables, and processed foods.

As I said earlier, we are developing a plan to help the sector adjust to the market-access commitments, in preparation for Canada's ratification of the Canada-European Union economic agreement.

We strongly support free trade and support implementing the Canada-European Union trade economic agreement.

On this side of the House, we support the supply management system. We support the farm families who benefit from this system, and unlike members in the opposition, we defend this system.

● (1845)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed by my colleague's answer. He delivered a partisan speech.

Members generally do not make partisan speeches in the House when we are talking about agriculture over the long term, because we are talking about people's lives.

In Canada, agriculture is a way of living. These people are very important to this side of the House. We need them every single day. My colleague read out the text that was given to him, I am sure. I hope for his sake that he understands the substance of what he said.

It is not acceptable to make a partisan speech when people truly need our help. My colleague needs to understand that the diafiltered milk problem has to be resolved. They have 15 days left to fulfill their promise. I would like to at least hear some talk about a possible solution. Our Canadian dairy producers deserve at least a glimmer of hope.

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Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague said, I am a dairy farmer, so I speak from experience.

It is rather ironic that the co-chair of an anti-supply-management campaign is trying to tell us how to protect that system. We are standing up strong for supply management and we will continue to do so. We are in regular contact with industry stakeholders, and we are listening to what they have to say about compensation. We are aware that compensation is important to the supply-managed sector.

Our government's investments will help the entire agriculture and agri-food industry, including hard-working producers in the supply-managed sector. We know that it is important to compensate the supply-managed sector in connection with the Canada-Europe free trade agreement. Engagement with the dairy sector is ongoing. We continue to engage with all farmers. We are there to support all farm families who benefit from the supply management system. We are all working together to ensure that they have a prosperous future.

• (1850)

[English]

LABOUR

Ms. Sheri Benson (Saskatoon West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the right to refuse unsafe work is one of the three basic health and safety rights achieved by the labour movement, along with the right to know about the hazards in one's workplace and the right to participate in workplace health and safety decisions. While procedures and circumstances may vary from province to province, just about all workers have the legal right to a healthy and safe workplace that allows, and in some provinces obligates, them to protect their safety by refusing to perform work they believe has the potential to harm themselves or others at the work site.

All workers in Canada have the right to work in a safe and healthy environment. Over the last decade, the previous Conservative government had undone many of the progressive advances for workers that had been achieved over generations.

On February 19, I asked the government why it had not tabled legislation to reverse some of the most egregious changes brought in by the Conservatives. Sadly, I did not get an answer.

On the health and safety front, the Conservatives used the omnibus bill, Bill C-4, to change the Canadian Labour Code to limit the rights of workers to refuse unsafe work, and also to do away with the independent health and safety officers, relegating their responsibilities to political appointees of the minister.

The bill also made sweeping changes to the Public Service Labour Relations Act to prevent federal public service workers from filing complaints with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. It also gutted public service collective bargaining by allowing the government to unilaterally determine which workers would be deemed essential and therefore forbidden from striking, without recourse to a third party review.

During the debate about these changes, many individuals and organizations brought forward grave concerns.

Larry Rousseau of PSAC wrote that the changes that were stuffed into the 309-page budget implementation act would turn the clock back 50 years for labour relations.

However, no voice was more compelling than that of Rob Ellis, whose 18 year-old son, David, was killed on the job. On David's second day of work at a temporary position in a bakery, he was pulled into an industrial mixer that was operating without a safety guard and lockout. David lacked the experience to comprehend the dangers of the workplace.

Rob Ellis, his dad, said:

We should not assume that new workers have enough experience to recognize or categorize the level of danger of every workplace condition. New or young employees should be encouraged to say no to unsafe work. And when they do stand up and say no, they should not be subject to discipline if their complaint is rejected without investigation...

During the federal election, the parliamentary secretary's website promised that a Liberal government would, "Repeal the Conservative definition of "danger" in the Canada Labour Code that is regressive and sacrifices the health and safety rights of workers." Why has the minister remained silent? Through the hon. parliamentary secretary, I simply ask the minister this. When will the government repeal these draconian measures?

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague from Saskatoon West on her speech and of course her great interest in labour and labour issues. I would like to share with the rest of the House as well that we share a similar view on what transpired over the past 10 years and with the former Conservative government.

Canadians were not fooled. They understood fully that it was organized labour that was under attack under the last government. We saw that through many manifestations, through various pieces of legislation. We saw it in unprecedented use of back-to-work legislation. The legislation for Canada Post and for Air Canada come to mind. Even before those organizations were in a strike position and those unions were in a position that they could go out on strike, there was back-to-work legislation coming off the shelf to be presented in the House.

We saw that, and absolutely Bill C-377 and Bill C-525 were directed at organized labour. With Bill C-377 we saw that constitutional experts said it was unconstitutional. We saw privacy experts say that it compromised the privacy of millions of Canadians. We saw provinces and territories say that it infringed on an area of their purview, that constitutionally it was their area of responsibility.

That was what we saw. That was the table that was set in the last Parliament by the last government.

Certainly what we have tried to do since October 19 and since the new minister came in on November 4 was to set a different atmosphere around work and labour. Certainly the current Bill C-4, not the old Conservative Bill C-4, was the first piece of legislation our minister presented. It was to repeal Bill C-377 and Bill C-525, within Bill C-4. I was very happy that it was the first piece of legislation the minister tabled.

Over the course of my experience over the last four years dealing with both employers and employees, one thing that has been consistent and that has been clear coming from both areas is that any changes to the Labour Code have to be done through a tripartite approach with labour, employers, employees, stakeholders, the provinces and territories—everybody involved.

They said that clearly with Bill C-377 and they said it with Bill C-525. We believe that the 2004 definition that was brought in by past Liberal governments is the right way to go, but that any change in the code has to be undertaken with a tripartite approach. I hope my colleague from Saskatoon West will understand that is the approach this government would take in changing the Labour Code. It would be under a tripartite approach.

● (1855)

Ms. Sheri Benson: Mr. Speaker, I do want to thank my hon. colleague for his comments and for his government's leadership in that very early period of stepping out of the gate when becoming a new government and focusing on some very important legislation that, for workers, was important to get changed quickly.

I would say to some of the member's comments about the Canada Labour Code that the changes that were made by the previous government were just changed unilaterally by the government.

What we are asking, particularly when it comes to workplace safety, is that we immediately go back and give more than 800,000 workers who work in federally regulated industries, including the public service, what they deserve. They deserve the right to refuse unsafe work; and they deserve the right to safeguard their health

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through a system of monitoring and enforcement by trained and neutral health and safety officers and, if necessary, a recourse to a tribunal staffed by independent decision-makers. They deserve the right to come home safely at the end of every work day.

I am asking the government to step up and step out sooner rather than later, and make sure everyone comes home safely.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Mr. Speaker, again, for my colleague and everybody else in the House, the government is pledging to keep Canadian workplaces safe, fair, and productive, certainly in federal jurisdictions. Our intention is to work with all stakeholders, employers, employees, organized labour, the provinces, and the territories to ensure our labour code reflects today's workforce and the necessity to be safe, fair, and productive.

Let me be clear. We believe all Canadians should have, and deserve, the right to work in a safe workplace. Certainly our intention is to work toward that. We believe we are off to a pretty good start and we hope to continue on to ensure we earn the confidence of Canadian workers not only in federal jurisdictions, but all Canadian workers. We are committed to that as a government, and that is what we will do.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7 p.m.)

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