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(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 8, 2018

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 8, 2018

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1005)

[*English*]

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

The Speaker: Pursuant to subsection 79.2(2) of the Parliament of Canada Act, it is my duty to present the House a report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer, entitled, "Supplementary Estimates (A), 2018-19".

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 11 petitions.

* * *

MACKENZIE VALLEY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ACT

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-88, An Act to amend the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act and the Canada Petroleum Resources Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 24th report of the Standing Committee on Finance entitled, "Confronting Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing: Moving Canada Forward". Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report. This report accomplishes the five-year statutory review of the Proceeds of Crime (Money Laundering) and Terrorist Financing Act. I have to send a heartfelt thanks to all members of all parties of the committee for their hard work in producing this report. This was a study where partisanship really did not intervene. I also want to thank the Library of Parliament staff who worked long hours to produce this end product.

I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 25th report of the Standing Committee on Finance in relation to Supplementary Estimates (A), 2018-19.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 75th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs entitled, "Approval and Updating of the House of Commons Electronic Petitions System". As members know, a couple of years ago, Parliament had the idea to add electronic petitions as an option to paper petitions, so a provisional test project was conducted for a couple of years. After that time, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs did a review and suggested that it be permanent and made improvements to the petitions system. If this report is implemented, it will make electronic petitions permanent and more efficient.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Orders 104 and 114, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 76th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of committees of the House. If the House gives its consent, I would like to move concurrence in the report now.

● (1010)

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Yukon have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Yes.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

EATING DISORDERS

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to once again rise in this House to table petitions concerning a pan-Canadian strategy on eating disorders.

Eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia, have the highest mortality rate of all mental illnesses. However, the sooner someone receives treatment, the better the chance of recovery.

Currently there are children as young as seven who are affected by eating disorders, have been diagnosed and are being hospitalized for these eating disorders. More than one million Canadian sufferers and families have been negatively affected physically, emotionally and financially by these struggles.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to support Motion No. 117, which happens to be my motion. They are asking that the government initiate discussions with the provincial and territorial ministers responsible for health and all stakeholders to develop this comprehensive, pan-Canadian strategy for eating disorders, and that it should include prevention, diagnosis, treatment and support, as well as research.

CANADA POST

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition in support of postal banking.

Nearly two million Canadians desperately need an alternative to payday lenders, whose crippling lending rates affect the poor, marginalized, rural and indigenous communities most.

The petitioners point out that 3,800 Canada Post outlets already exist in rural areas where there are few or no banks at all. Canada Post has the infrastructure to make a rapid transition to include postal banking.

The petitioners are calling on the Government of Canada to create a committee to study and propose a plan for postal banking under the Canada Post Corporation.

MILITARY VOLUNTEER SERVICE MEDAL

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my second petition is timely in light of Remembrance Day on Sunday.

The petitioners, citizens of Canada, draw the attention of the House to the fact that at one time the Government of Canada issued the Canadian volunteer service medal to recognize Canadians who served voluntarily in the Canadian Forces. This medal was stopped in 1947.

The undersigned citizens call on the Government of Canada to recognize, by means of the creation and issuance of a new Canadian military volunteer service medal to be designated the Canadian military volunteer service medal, for volunteer service by Canadians in the regular forces, reserve military forces and cadet corps support staff, all who have completed 365 days of uninterrupted, honourable duty in service to this country.

The petitioners wish that this be presented in perpetuity.

[*Translation*]

SENIORS

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to present a petition signed by a number of people in my riding, Hochelaga, who are asking the Parliament of Canada to work with the provinces, territories, municipalities and seniors' organizations to develop a national strategy on aging that will secure high-quality public health care and reduce out-of-pocket health expenses for all seniors, ensure that affordable and appropriate housing that adapts to changing needs is available to seniors, increase income security for seniors, develop policies that secure quality of life and equality for all seniors, and create a seniors' advocate to ensure that these measures are undertaken and maintained.

[*English*]

JUSTICE

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege today of presenting a petition from more than 150 Edmontonians. Those petitioners remind us that the Canadian government has publicly committed itself to the defence of human rights internationally and that the Magnitsky act was passed a year ago, allowing for restrictive measures to be taken against foreign nationals responsible for gross violations of internationally recognized human rights. They remind us that today the Canadian government has taken no action against Russian authorities responsible for the unlawful imprisonment and brutal ill treatment of three Ukrainian hunger strikers, Oleg Sentsov, Oleksandr Kolchenko, Volodymyr Balukh, and approximately 60 other Ukrainian political prisoners. The Magnitsky act has not been invoked against Russian officials responsible for these violations. The petitioners call on the House of Commons to demand the release of those political prisoners and the dozens of others illegally detained by the Russian government and to employ all possible sanctions, including measures under the Magnitsky act.

● (1015)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, marine plastics are spreading all over B.C.'s coasts, entering salmon and littering beaches. A lot of it is coming from British Columbia but some is also coming from overseas. Petitioners from Nanaimo, Parksville and Lantzville have asked me to convey to the House their strong call for the government to develop a national strategy to combat marine plastic pollution, which would particularly involve regulations on the single use of plastics to prevent plastics from entering the marine environment in the first place and also to fund in a permanent ongoing way some of the pieces we have been unable to tackle like ghost nets, which move across the ocean capturing fish, dolphins and so on. It is a terrible emergency. We call on the government to act.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following questions will be answered today: Nos. 1931 and 1932.

[*Text*]

Question No. 1931— **Mr. Todd Doherty**:

> With regard to government expenditures on roadside testing devices for drug impairment, since January 1, 2017: (*a*) how many devices has the government provided to police departments, broken down by department; (*b*) what is the total amount spent on the devices; (*c*) how many devices does the government recommend each department have; (*d*) how many devices does each department currently have, according to latest information obtained by the government; and (*e*) what are the details of any specific funding which is currently in place to address the difference between how many devices each department currently has and how many devices each department is recommended to have?

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Youth) and to the Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), currently, Public Safety, PS, has not provided any drug screening equipment to police departments. PS is working with all provinces and territories to determine their requirements and deployment plans for roadside testing devices in order to finalize funding levels and arrangements. The provinces are responsible for the administration of justice in their jurisdictions and determine their operational requirements. It is important to note that investigating drug-impaired driving is not dependent on roadside testing devices. They are an additional tool available to law enforcement. Many frontline law enforcement officers already have training to detect the signs and symptoms related to drug-impaired driving.

With regard to (b), the first drug screener was approved for use by the Attorney General of Canada on August 22, 2018. While notional funding allocations are being discussed with all provinces and territories, funding has not yet been finalized.

With regard to (c), the government does not make recommendations on operational policing matters. This is the responsibility of provinces and territories and law enforcement.

With regard to (d), information is not available.

With regard to (e), it is not applicable.

PS and the RCMP, in collaboration with the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators, and law enforcement from across Canada, undertook a pilot project to test the use of oral fluid drug screening devices as tools to enhance the enforcement of drug-impaired driving. For the purposes of this project, drug screening devices and associated test kits were ordered for a total cost of $198,968.14.

For further information please visit the following website for information on the pilot project: https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrcs/pblctns/rl-fld-drg-scrnng-dvc-plt/index-en.aspx

In addition, the RCMP purchased 20 drug screeners to provide initial training on the use of drug screeners to a cohort of trainers and frontline users in advance of October 17, 2018, for a total of $122,640.00.

Question No. 1932— **Mr. Jamie Schmale**:

> With regard to the current lack of construction occurring on the TransMountain Pipeline Expansion: what are the contents of any estimates or analysis the government has conducted on the financial impact resulting from the delay in construction?

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on August 30, 2018, the Federal Court of Appeal quashed the Trans Mountain expansion project's federal certificate. The Government of Canada accepts the effect of the court's decision and is committed to moving the project forward in the right way. In this regard, on September 20, 2018, the government directed the National Energy Board to reconsider its recommendation on the project in relation to environmental effects of project-related marine shipping.

On October 3, 2018, the government announced its intent to correct flaws noted by the court in the existing consultation with Indigenous peoples. Once those steps are complete, the government will consider all of the evidence, including new analysis by the National Energy Board and new information collected through indigenous consultation, and make a new decision on the project. It would be inappropriate for the government to prejudge the outcome of that decision until it can review all of the evidence.

When appropriate to do so, Trans Mountain Corporation will formally update the planned construction schedule and costs estimate for the expansion project. Accordingly, no estimate of the financial impact of the court's decision is available at this time.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised on November 1, by the hon. member for Berthier—Maskinongé concerning the response to the New Democratic Party Vice-Chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food during oral questions.

I would like to thank the member for Berthier—Maskinongé for having raised the matter, as well as the members for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, Perth—Wellington and Durham for their observations.

Essentially, the member is asking for clarification on the Speaker's role with respect to oral questions, given that the NDP vice-chair was not permitted to finish his reply about committee business.

[*Translation*]

As I reminded members when this point of order was first raised, questions about committees are quite restricted. *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Third Edition, at pages 512 and 513, is clear in this respect, stating:

> Questions seeking information about the schedule and agenda of committees may be directed to Chairs of committees. Questions to the Ministry or to a committee Chair concerning the proceedings or work of a committee, including its order of reference, may not be raised.

[*English*]

Speaker Lamoureux, in a ruling on May 20, 1970, which can be found at page 7126 of Debates, explained the only questions that are acceptable when directed to the chairman of a committee are questions that relate to procedural matters, whether a meeting is to be held, whether a committee will be convened, at what time a committee will be held and so on.

[*Translation*]

The answers to such questions about committees must fall within these same prescribed limits. As indicated at page 1041 of Bosc and Gagnon:

> During Oral Questions in the House, a committee Chair may answer questions, provided they deal with the committee's agenda or schedule and not with the substance of its work.

The Speaker has the authority to judge the admissibility of questions, including those put to a committee chair. Deputy Speaker Blaikie informed the House on April 3, 2008, at page 4406 of Debates, that:

> ...in future when considering the procedural acceptability of such questions, the Chair intends to demand strict adherence to the intended practice, namely, the scheduling and agenda of committee meetings.

[*English*]

However, it is not up to the Chair to judge the quality or content of answers, save for unparliamentary language. The constant challenge for the Chair is, on the one hand, to uphold the limits placed on questions asked about committees, and on the other hand, to refrain from judging the quality of the answers. Perhaps it is this that explains, at least in part, the approach of the Chair in according chairs and vice-chairs the benefit of the doubt. It is an approach the Chair will uphold going forward.

The rapid pace of question period, given the 35-second limit on both questions and answers, requires the Chair to make quick decisions, and it is always with the intent of respecting our rules and practices. It is in this context that I, as Speaker, look forward to working with all members to ensure that our practices are followed in any exchanges of information about committees.

I thank members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

CRIMINAL CODE

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-75, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

● (1020)

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: There are 14 motions in amendment standing on the Notice Paper for the report stage of Bill C-75. Motions Nos. 1 to 14 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motions Nos. 1 to 14 to the House.

● (1025)

[*English*]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (for the Minister of Justice) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-75 be amended by deleting Clause 22.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-75 be amended by deleting Clause 61.

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-75 be amended by deleting Clause 87.

Motion No. 4

That Bill C-75 be amended by deleting Clause 89.

Motion No. 5

That Bill C-75 be amended by deleting Clause 90.

Motion No. 6

That Bill C-75 be amended by deleting Clause 106.

Motion No. 7

That Bill C-75 be amended by deleting Clause 107.

Motion No. 8

That Bill C-75 be amended by deleting Clause 108.

Motion No. 9

That Bill C-75 be amended by deleting Clause 109.

Motion No. 10

That Bill C-75 be amended by deleting Clause 186.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (for the Minister of Justice) moved:

Motion No. 11

That Bill C-75, in Clause 294, be amended by replacing lines 10 and 11 on page 120 with the following:

"mony given by a police officer, as defined in section 183, in the presence of an accused during a voir"

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 12

That Bill C-75 be amended by deleting Clause 310.

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (for the Minister of Justice) moved:

Motion No. 13

That Bill C-75, in Clause 389, be amended by replacing, in the French version, line 6 on page 183 with the following:

"difiant le Code criminel, la Loi"

Motion No. 14

That Bill C-75, in Clause 407, be amended by deleting lines 23 to 32 on page 197.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in the report stage debate in support of Bill C-75, an act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other acts and to make consequential amendments thereto.

As a lawyer, I am all too familiar with the effect of delays on all Canadians, particularly those involved in the criminal justice system. I am proud to be a member of a government that is taking a meaningful and significant approach to promoting efficiency in our criminal justice system, reducing case completion times and contributing to increased public confidence while respecting the rights of those involved and ensuring that public safety is maintained.

[*Translation*]

I believe that, together, all of the elements of Bill C-75 will help create the necessary change in culture and strengthen the criminal justice system's capacity to complete cases within the time frame prescribed by the Supreme Court of Canada in the Jordan decision and recommended by the Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in its report entitled "Delaying Justice is denying justice".

[*English*]

I am grateful to the House Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights for its hard work in studying Bill C-75.

Although there are many important aspects of this bill that I believe will contribute to a more efficient criminal justice system, I would like to focus my remarks this morning on preliminary inquiry reform, enhancing judicial case management, and facilitating remote appearances. I would also like briefly to touch on the amendments brought forward by the committee and consequential technical amendments thereto.

[*Translation*]

As the minister pointed out in her speech, Bill C-75 includes two proposals for preliminary inquiries.

First, the bill would restrict the availability of this procedure to accused adults charged with 63 of the most serious Criminal Code offences that are punishable by life imprisonment, such as kidnapping and murder.

Second, it would strengthen the powers of judges at the preliminary inquiry and limit the issues explored and the number of witnesses to be heard.

[*English*]

The Supreme Court of Canada, in Jordan, and the Senate legal affairs committee, in its final report on delays, recommended that preliminary inquiry reform be considered.

We acknowledge that the issue of preliminary inquiry reform has been the subject of lively debate for literally decades. Some have said that restricting preliminary inquiries would have little impact on delays, given that they are held in only 3% of cases. However, it is important to underscore that this impact would be greater in those provinces where the preliminary inquiry procedure is widely used, such as in Ontario and in the province of Quebec.

Also, we cannot overlook the cumulative impact of all of Bill C-75's proposals that seek to streamline the criminal justice system processes.

[*Translation*]

Lawyers Laurelly Dale and Michael Spratt testified before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights that limiting preliminary inquiries, as the bill proposes, could result in delays and undermine the accused's right to a fair trial. In contrast, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police indicated in its written submissions that it supported the reforms.

In addition, Daisy Kler from the Vancouver Rape Relief & Women's Shelter and Elizabeth Sheehy said that these reforms were a step in the right direction and that requiring victims to testify twice, once at the preliminary inquiry and again at the trial, increases the risk of revictimization.

[*English*]

As stated by the Minister of Justice at the second reading of Bill C-75, the proposed preliminary inquiry amendments are the culmination of years of study and consideration in various fora, such as federal-provincial-territorial meetings. These reforms represent a balanced approach between the opposing views put forward before both committees and expressed before this very chamber. They would make this procedure more efficient and more expedient while respecting the rights of the accused to a fair trial and preventing some witnesses and victims from having to testify twice, which can have a very important impact, as I just mentioned, on women litigants in the criminal justice system.

Bill C-75 would also allow for the earlier appointment of case management judges, recognizing their unique and vital role in ensuring that the momentum of cases is maintained and that they are completed in an efficient, effective, just and timely manner.

[*Translation*]

Bill C-75 also proposes to expand the use of remote appearances provided for in the Criminal Code by enabling anyone participating in criminal cases to appear by audioconference or video conference throughout the trial, as long as the applicable criteria are met. This would include the accused, the witnesses, the lawyers, the judges or justices of the peace, the interpreters and the sureties.

● (1030)

[*English*]

Canada has allowed remote appearances for many years. These amendments seek to broaden the existing framework, with the possibility of using technology to promote access to justice where the infrastructure exists and as permitted by the rules of court.

These optional tools in Bill C-75 aim to increase access to justice, streamline processes and reduce system costs, such as the cost of the accused's transport and the cost of witness attendance, without impacting existing resources such as those through the indigenous court worker program. They also respond to the Senate committee's recommendation to increase the use of remote appearances for accused persons.

The proposals in Bill C-75 in relation to preliminary inquiries, judicial case management and remote appearances, together with all the other reforms in this bill, would ensure that our criminal justice system was efficient, just and in line with the values of our communities and all Canadians.

As a product of the extensive study of this bill and the compelling testimony from witnesses, the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights amended the bill with regard to routine police evidence and some reclassification of offences. As a result of these amendments, four technical and consequential amendments must be moved to ensure coherence in the legislation. These amendments follow from the proper amendments made by the committee.

The first of the technical amendments involves the consequential amendment to clause 294 of Bill C-75. This clause deals with the admission of police officer transcripts as evidence and currently references the definition of "a police officer" in proposed section 657.01 of the Criminal Code. As proposed section 657.01 was amended and deleted at committee, an amendment is now required to clause 294 to remove the reference to that previously proposed section.

The second and third amendments being put forward today respond to the committee's intention to keep the offences of advocating or promoting the commission of terrorism, under section 83.221 of the Code, as a straight indictable offence. Accordingly, the second amendment today would delete clause 22, and the third amendment would delete subclause 407(5), which is a coordinating clause in accordance with Bill C-59. Again, these are consequential technical amendments that follow from the important and extensive study by the committee of this bill.

The fourth amendment presented to the House today would correct a drafting error resulting from an amendment to clause 389, which includes a mistake in the French version of the title of Bill C-75 and describes Bill C-75 as "*Loi modifiant le Code criminel, la Loi sur le système de justice pénale pour les adolescents et d'autres lois et apportant des modifications corrélatives à certaines lois*". This is again a technical amendment that follows from the important amendments made at the committee stage.

To conclude, I want to highlight what we are doing in this law. We have a situation where access to justice is critical. We have a situation where court delays are preventing justice from being rendered. We also have the Jordan decision that was presented by the Supreme Court of Canada. Following the results of the Jordan decision, the minister and the parliamentary secretary went around the country and heard from stakeholders. They heard from people in the system. They heard from federal, provincial and territorial partners. As a result of that collaboration with provincial and territorial partners, we put forward Bill C-75 in this House. The bill was then studied at committee stage and the committee, after hearing robust testimony from a number of stakeholders from around the country who were involved in the criminal justice system, properly and rightfully took the initiative to amend the bill in the right direction with respect to the key areas I have mentioned. That is the way our system is meant to work. It is meant to work collaboratively, and that is what we did with this bill.

Bill C-75 would ensure that women were not revictimized through the preliminary inquiry process. The bill would ensure that we would no longer have the overrepresentation of indigenous and other marginalized communities in our justice system by changing the way we select jurors and changing the tools judges have to ensure more diverse and representative juries in communities. Very importantly, Bill C-75 would ensure access to justice. It would treat administration of justice offences through a separate model, a different model, that would allow things to be dealt with in a more general manner, in a manner that would speed up the proceedings and would not overly criminalize people who are interacting with the justice system.

These are important initiatives. This is an important bill. It is in the right direction, and that is why I urge all members of this House to support it.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice noted that at the justice committee the Liberal members did the right thing in supporting our Conservative amendments to amend Bill C-75.

Thus, serious indictable offences, namely terrorism and genocide-related offences, would not be reclassified as hybrid offences. In doing so, they listened to the testimony of, among others, Shimon Fogel from the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs, who said that reclassifying such offences would send "a clear and unacceptable signal diminishing the inherently grave, even heinous, nature of these crimes." Similarly, the member for Edmonton Centre said, "Let's be serious.... We're talking about very serious offences."

Unfortunately, the government decided to double down on the reclassification of offences such as impaired driving causing bodily harm and kidnapping a minor under the age of 14. What kind of message does that send?

● (1035)

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker. the member opposite referenced Mr. Shimon Fogel from CIJA, whom we were very pleased to see here yesterday to hear the Prime Minister apologize for historic anti-Semitism in this country and for the continued fight against it now.

Apropos of that very apology and that very serious issue in this country, the step that the committee members took is one that we agree with as a government. When we take seriously the fight against racism and discrimination and hatred, then we must demonstrate significantly and strongly that incidents and crimes such as advocating genocide need to be denounced in the strongest terms. Those types of offences need to remain and will remain as straight indictable offences.

That is the result of the hard work that was done at committee, and we agree with it fully.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am deeply concerned and share the concern expressed in the House and at committee by my colleague, the NDP justice critic, the member for Victoria. Despite the Minister of Justice's mandate letter, which directed that she remove mandatory minimum sentences, and despite the fact that the criminal trial lawyers association of Canada called for that reform because of the delays in court proceedings, many matters are going to trial because of the fear of minimum mandatory sentencing.

Could the member speak to why they did not deliver on the instruction of removing the minimum mandatory sentences? Why did they refuse to do that? They could have done it within this 300-page bill.

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, the member opposite raises an important point and referenced the mandate given to the Minister of Justice. That mandate was to do a comprehensive review of the court and criminal justice systems and to propose methods of reform to speed up the processes and make them more efficient. That is exactly what we are doing with Bill C-75.

With Bill C-75, we are creating an administration of justice regime that will speed things up. Reducing the reliance on preliminary inquiries to a more circumscribed set of the most serious offences will speed things up in the criminal justice system.

The issue of mandatory minimums was raised at committee. It is an issue the government is seized with. It is an issue that requires broad, sweeping analysis and study. That is something the departmental officials indicated requires further consultation and study to get it right. A piecemeal approach to something in the nature of mandatory minimums would not be appropriate in this bill or otherwise.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary talked about speeding up the court system and access to justice and faster court times, believing that turning some of these very serious offences into summary offences or hybrid offences would somehow speed it up.

There is another option, namely, that the minister could fill the hundreds of judicial vacancies across this country so there is access to a judge. Right now that is another area she could act on very quickly. Why does she not do that?

Mr. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, the brief answer is that we are appointing judges at a rate that has not been seen in this country in over two decades.

The minister has made 230 judicial appointments around the country. She is also doing it in a manner that is commensurate with what the bench should reflect, that being the Canadians they serve and the Canadians to whom they render justice by promoting a number of women, visible minorities, members of the LGBTQ community and persons with disability.

We are not only appointing judges. We are appointing judges who look like Canada.

● (1040)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-75, the legislation the government has introduced that purportedly is aimed at dealing with the backlog and delays in Canada's courts.

The only problem with Bill C-75 is that it would do next to nothing to deal with the backlog and delays in our courts. Indeed, it is more than likely that Bill C-75 would do the opposite and actually increase delays in our courts.

This legislation was studied at the justice committee. I attended all of the justice committee meetings, where we heard from a wide array of witnesses. In the three years I have been a member of Parliament, I have never been at a committee where virtually all aspects of a bill have been as exhaustively and comprehensively panned as Bill C-75, a massive 300-page omnibus bill.

This legislation would do nothing to deal with delay.

The government came up with the brilliant idea that so-called routine police evidence could go in by way of affidavit. The only problem with that is it would require a whole new application process that defence counsel would inevitably use, resulting in more delay, not less. It is good that the government has backtracked from that aspect of Bill C-75.

The government then came up with the other idea that preliminary inquiries should be limited to only those cases for which the maximum sentence is life behind bars. When I asked justice department officials whether they had any data, any empirical evidence, to back up the assertion that preliminary inquiries were resulting in delay, they had no answer. I can point to empirical data that demonstrates that preliminary inquiries do speed up the process and do reduce delay. Eighty-six per cent of cases are resolved following a preliminary inquiry. That is what the statistical data show. The government has none to demonstrate the contrary.

Preliminary inquiries do provide an opportunity for counsel to clarify issues, to narrow issues, to test evidence. There is also an important discovery aspect to a preliminary inquiry.

Moreover, it is unclear how the government decided to arbitrarily create two streams of cases, one where the sentence would be life and the accused would be entitled to a preliminary inquiry, and another stream that would apply to all other cases, notwithstanding the fact that in many instances the sentencing ranges would be similar. In certain cases the accused would be entitled to a preliminary inquiry, in other instances he or she would not. It speaks to the very sloppy and haphazard way Bill C-75 was drafted.

The biggest problem with Bill C-75 is that under the guise of creating efficiencies in Canada's justice system, it would water down sentences for among the most serious indictable offences.

● (1045)

What sort of offences is Bill C-75 proposing to water down by reclassifying them from indictable to hybrid? We are talking, among other things, about impaired driving causing bodily harm. Impaired driving is the leading criminal cause of death in Canada. We are talking about administering date rape drugs, kidnapping a minor under the age of 16, kidnapping a minor under the age of 14, human trafficking and arson for a fraudulent purpose. The government is moving ahead with reclassifying those offences. What would be the effect of reclassification? Instead of a maximum sentence of up to 10 years, the maximum would be two years less a day if the accused were prosecuted by way of summary conviction.

The Minister of Justice has repeatedly said that we should not to worry, that it has nothing to do with sentencing and that, after all, the sentencing principles are the same. Well, of course the sentencing principles are the same, but when we are reducing sentences and taking away the discretion of a judge to fashion a sentence from up to 10 years to two years less a day, that has everything to do with sentencing.

Apparently, the Liberal members on the justice committee agree, because among the packages of offences that Bill C-75 would reclassify are terrorism-related offences, as well as the offence of inciting genocide. It is shocking to think that those types of offences would be lumped into a class of offence such as a minor property offence, but that is Bill C-75. It is a terribly crafted bill. However, in the end, fortunately they listened to the evidence that it would send the wrong message. Shimon Fogel from the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs said that it would send "a clear and unacceptable signal, diminishing the inherently grave, even heinous, nature of these crimes." The member for Edmonton Centre was quoted in the National Post as saying, "Let's be serious.... We're talking about very serious offences."

So much for the minister's assertion that reclassification would not have anything to do with sentencing or diminishing the seriousness of the offence. It absolutely does, and the member for Edmonton Centre acknowledged as much. Liberal MPs on the justice committee agreed when they voted in support of our amendments to remove the reclassification of terrorism and genocide-related offences.

What kind of a message, then, does it send when we are talking about reducing and watering down impaired driving offences, or administering a date rape drug, or kidnapping a minor? It sends exactly the wrong message. It diminishes the seriousness of those offences and it makes it possible that individuals who are charged with such offences could walk away with literally a slap on the wrist. Such offences have no business being reclassified. They have no business being left to a prosecutor somewhere in some office to make the call without any level of transparency and consistency. It is absolutely the wrong way to go.

It would also do nothing to reduce delays, because 99.6% of cases are already before provincial courts. We know that summary offences are before provincial courts. That means more downloading onto overstretched and overburdened provincial courts. It would not reduce delays, but it would water down sentences, undermining victims and public safety. Bill C-75 needs to be defeated out of hand.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have one comment and one question. I thank the member opposite for his work on the justice committee. He talked about delays. What I would put to him is that when we take administration of justice offences and no longer apply criminal charges to those issues, but instead a judicial referral hearing, we avoid clogging up the criminal justice system. That is a goal that both of us share.

The hon. member made a lot of important comments about victims and how they would be treated under this law and what the bill would do to them. Would he not agree that what we are doing in this legislation by defining intimate partner violence to include dating and former partners, and by increasing the maximum sentences for intimate partner violence and enacting a reverse onus on bail for repeat offenders, would protect the very victims, the women, the member opposite seeks to protect?

● (1050)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, I do support the parts of Bill C-75 related to intimate partner violence. We supported that at committee. Unfortunately, much of the rest of the bill is a mess.

The member spoke about AOJ offences, administration of justice offences. The bill seeks to do something about those, but the administration of justice offences take up very little court time. Why? Because in almost all instances, for example, if someone breaches bail, there is a substantive charge underlying that. Typically someone is not brought back into court until the main charge, the substantive charge, is dealt with.

While there was a lot of talk about administration of justice offences, very little court time is specifically devoted to them. That evidence was clear before the committee.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Madam Speaker, in its own report on the stakeholder consultations, the Department of Justice admitted that the strain on our system is largely due to social issues. Nearly all the participants in the round table raised the same major concerns. They said that the people coming into contact with the criminal justice system are almost all vulnerable or marginalized individuals, many of whom have issues with mental illness, substance addiction or violence.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks about the notion that the government should invest more in addressing the root causes of social inequality and stop criminalizing people in need of help.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper: Madam Speaker, what the government should do is invest in Canada's justice system by giving the actors within the justice system the tools and resources they need to deal with the backlog, including the prompt appointment of judges.

The parliamentary secretary can talk all he wants about how the minister is now appointing judges, but under the minister's watch, she failed to appoint judges for six months upon being appointed as Minister of Justice. She has seen judicial vacancies reach record levels.

It is the responsibility of the minister to fill judicial vacancies in a timely manner. Her failing to do so in the face of Jordan, upon which cases are at risk of being thrown out of court and, indeed, are being thrown out of court as a result of this minister's inaction, is not just inexcusable, it is negligence of the highest order.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-75. This is a very large, very complex bill that touches on many important issues related to our justice system.

Obviously, I will not have enough time today to cover every element of the bill, so I will just focus on the aspects that interest me the most. However, I want to start by giving some background on the events that led to this bill and how it concerns my constituents.

As we know, Bill C-75 is a response to the Jordan decision, in which the courts ruled that there were unacceptable trial delays and that proceedings would now be terminated after a certain time frame. This was concerning to my constituents and to all MPs, especially those from Quebec, because we have seen several troubling cases in Quebec. In some cases, people charged with horrific crimes have been freed because of Jordan. These have been sordid and disturbing cases for the affected communities.

The Jordan decision seeks to address major issues, particularly with respect to services to indigenous peoples and the administration of justice. This is essential for maintaining public confidence in the justice system, especially the confidence of people who have asked me about many disturbing, high-profile cases. It is essential because the justice system cannot function properly without maintaining public confidence.

If I can wear my public safety critic hat for a moment, I would say the same is true in many situations involving public safety. This is not just about the justice system, but also the correctional system and police forces or national security agencies, which also play a role here.

Given the importance of maintaining public confidence, this bill had to be thoroughly reviewed. On that I want to commend my seat mate, the hon. member for Victoria, who was one of the finalists in the hardest working category of the Parliamentarians of the Year Awards, and rightly so. It is not difficult to understand why when we read a bill like this one, because these are extremely complicated matters that require rigorous review.

We must also exercise caution in political debate. To prevent undermining public confidence, we do not want the procedures and the implementation of these measures to be tainted by partisanship. This cannot be repeated often enough.

In this context, the objective of the bill in question is primarily to reduce legal delays. There are several positive elements, but some flaws as well, and although my time is limited, I would like to address some of them.

The first element, mandatory minimum sentencing, is the most important. This type of sentencing became singularly common during the last Parliament under the majority Conservative government. However, this policy failed, not just in Canada, but in the United States as well, where even very right-wing Republican legislators realized that it did nothing for public safety.

Mandatory minimum sentencing is imposed on judges by law to punish all sorts of crimes, which are often horrible. This creates a number of problems. The first obvious problem is that it eliminates judicial discretion, which weakens our judicial system. Also, mandatory minimum sentences are often intended to punish crimes that are driven by other social factors. We are therefore exacerbating troubling social phenomena, such as the overrepresentation of members of racialized populations or indigenous people in the prison and legal systems.

● (1055)

Some crimes, like drug possession and use, are public health issues and not law and order issues. We cannot minimize how important these issues are.

The facts, from Canada and elsewhere, show three things. First is obviously the social impact, as I just explained. Second is that, on several occasions, the courts struck down some of the legislation that was passed during the previous Parliament. For example, they threw out the Conservative provisions around mandatory minimums. Third, the mandatory minimums did not achieve the goals of increasing public safety, putting dangerous criminals behind bars and reducing recidivism rates.

I brought up this issue in reference to the previous government. What does this have to do with this bill introduced by the current Liberal government? During the previous Parliament, a number of Liberal members spoke out against such policies. At the time, the Minister of Justice and other members of the current government said loud and clear that this was an issue that needed to be fixed quickly. Now, we see that Bill C-75, which they already took far too long to introduce, does nothing to address this issue, even though the Liberals have been in government for three years.

My colleague from Edmonton Strathcona raised the issue with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice earlier today. The parliamentary secretary responded that it was an issue the government was seized with. The time for considering this issue is long past, which has become a trend with this government. This policy was doomed to fail even before the Liberals were elected, because it penalizes the people we want to help out of poverty so that they can contribute to their communities and our society. The Liberals missed an opportunity to fix this very important issue that has been around for a long time.

Certain U.S. states that lean heavily Republican, commonly known as red states, have observed over the course of many years that this policy is doomed to failure. If they have been able to see this, I think a supposedly progressive government should be able to see it too. These judicial reforms have been too long in the making, and I hoped this bill would take care of the problem, but sadly not. As has happened far too often since this government was elected, we will have to look to the Senate for a solution. An excellent bill has been proposed by Senator Kim Pate to address the issue of mandatory minimum sentences. That bill is one to keep an eye on. All in all, the government has missed an opportunity.

I want to talk about another element of the bill, namely hybrid offences. This is a very important part of the bill because it should help speed up the administration of justice. However, we have learned that this measure could increase the burden on the provinces. It is important to remember that the provinces are responsible for the administration of justice.

Representatives of the Quebec bar told the committee that it is not so concerning for them, because Quebec already has a very robust justice system that gives the prosecutor significant discretion. The Crown works hard to assess cases appropriately in order to prevent a backlog and minimize delays in the justice system.

When we are placing an additional burden on the provinces and have to rely on the provincial governments' goodwill, it is a sign that the federal government has a lot of work to do to make all this easier. Obviously, Bill C-75 does not really achieve that objective.

Unfortunately, it looks like my time is up. There were other elements I would have liked to address. This is, of course, a very large and complicated bill. The Liberals missed an opportunity to carry out the necessary administrative reforms to our justice system.

● (1100)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his speech and comments.

In his speech, he indicated that we, on this side of the House, spend too much time consulting and that we do not take real action.

I would like to point out some of the ways that we have taken action that he might agree with.

[*English*]

The issue is what we are acting on. A decision was made in this country with respect to the death of Colten Boushie. The individual involved in the death of Colten Boushie was acquitted by a jury that was entirely unrepresentative of that community. There was not a single indigenous person on that jury, for the simple reason that peremptory challenges were used as a sword by counsel in that case to ensure an all-white jury.

Liberals have acted quickly since that decision and in respect of what we have heard in Manitoba, from Justice Iacobucci and from aboriginal witnesses and indigenous intervenors at the committee, who asked us to do away with peremptory challenges because that would help ensure there are more representative juries in our criminal justice system. This will hopefully cure the overrepresentation of indigenous people in the criminal justice system. The overrepresentation of indigenous and racialized persons is something I believe my colleague opposite and I share as a preoccupation and a priority of the highest order.

I would elicit the comments of the member opposite on whether he agrees with those provisions of this legislation.

● (1105)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We do in fact support those aspects of the bill. Since the devil is in the details, we will obviously have to see how those things will be implemented. The case my colleague mentioned is indeed very troubling. The matter of representation of indigenous peoples and racialized groups on juries in Canada must be resolved.

On the flip side, this bill does not fully resolve the issues related to mandatory minimum sentencing and all of the other aspects of the justice system that lead to an overrepresentation of vulnerable people in the correctional and justice systems.

It would be disingenuous of me to say anything other than the fact that I appreciate my colleague's goodwill. I do not want to diminish the importance of consultation, but I think that after being in office for a number of years now, the government could have done more to remedy the problems that perpetuate these social injustices. The bill contains good measures, but obviously more needs to be done.

[*English*]

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am vice-chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, and we heard very disturbing testimony about the impact of mandatory minimums, particularly on single mothers and indigenous women. In the past, judges had the discretion to say mothers could serve their sentences on weekends and look after their kids during the week. It has broken families, and kids have been forced into foster care because that flexibility no longer exists.

I heard the parliamentary secretary say we need more consultation on this. I would like to hear my colleague's view of whether there is any clearer direction than the several court rulings that have asked the government to move away from this practice. Does my colleague really think we need more consultation, or should the government have acted in this legislation to carry out the instructions in the Prime Minister's mandate letter to end the practice of mandatory minimums?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I share her dismay at the thought of women losing custody of their children because of a law whose mandatory minimum sentences were ruled inappropriate by several courts.

As she correctly pointed out, it was in the mandate letters, and more consultation is needed. In addition to the court rulings, we can consider the facts themselves: this policy has not achieved the desired outcomes, it has not ensured public safety, and it has not reduced recidivism. In some cases, it has had the opposite effect. The facts are very clear.

I think everyone involved, those from civil society especially, agrees with us. That is why the Prime Minister wisely included this directive in the mandate letters. Now we are asking the government to do the right thing by implementing this new policy and putting an end to provisions brought in by the Conservative government.

[*English*]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-75, an act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other acts and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

I would like to begin today by acknowledging the contributions of all members of the House, particularly the members of the committee, for their hard work, engagement and debate on Bill C-75. It is clear that members of all parties learned a great deal from the testimony that was heard, and the country as a whole benefited from the committee's in-depth consideration of this transformative bill.

The committee heard from roughly 95 groups and individuals covering a broad range of issues, in addition to reviewing 58 briefs. I would like to take a moment to share some of the different perspectives that members heard and read on Bill C-75 in relation to its potential impacts on indigenous peoples and persons from vulnerable populations.

The committee heard significant praise of Bill C-75's proposal to codify a principle of restraint that would guide police and courts in making bail decisions. The principle dictates that police and courts would be required to give primary consideration to releasing an accused at the earliest opportunity and apply the least onerous conditions that are appropriate in the circumstances. Police and courts would be required to ask if the conditions are responsibly practical for the accused to comply with and necessary for public safety to ensure the accused's attendance in court. The proposed principle of restraint aims to remove unnecessary strain on the criminal justice system and reflects the principles set out by the Supreme Court of Canada.

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the Canadian Bar Association, the Society of United Professionals, the Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, Aboriginal Legal Services and the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres are just some of the witness groups that came forward and expressed support for these measures. The sheer diversity of support that this proposal has received speaks volumes about the significance of these reforms, which are long overdue. The Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres in particular noted that the principle of restraint would benefit indigenous persons who often have to travel away from their communities to get to court, far from their family and social support systems.

Bill C-75's proposal to codify the principle of restraint further requires police and courts to give particular attention to the circumstances of indigenous and vulnerable accused, who are overrepresented in the criminal justice system and disadvantaged in seeking bail. According to 2016-17 data from Statistics Canada, the proportion of indigenous adults admitted into a provincial or territorial correctional institution is roughly seven times higher than the rest of the Canadian population, and this figure has been steadily increasing since 2007. For indigenous women in federal correctional institutions, the proportion is eight times higher than for non-indigenous women. In 2012, Statistics Canada reported that individuals suffering from mental health disorders were four times more likely than those without a disorder to report being arrested by the police.

Moreover, indigenous people and vulnerable persons tend to be disproportionately impacted by onerous and unnecessary bail conditions, more likely to be charged with breaching minor conditions, and more likely to be caught in the revolving door of the criminal justice system. These facts are indicative of a systemic problem in need of comprehensive reform.

While some witnesses, such as Professor Marie-Eve Sylvestre from the University of Ottawa, suggested that the law should define vulnerable persons, we are confident that the current, broad approach will allow for its meaning to evolve over time by being interpreted on a case-by-case basis, and avoid excluding certain groups. I would also note that the existing provision gives direction in terms of which types of vulnerability are relevant, by specifically targeting groups that are overrepresented in the criminal justice system and disadvantaged in obtaining bail.

The proposals relating to administration of justice offences also received broad support from witnesses during the committee's review of Bill C-75. These proposals would involve an alternative process called a judicial referral hearing, which is essentially an off-ramp for minor breaches that do not involve harm to a victim or witness. These breaches would not result in criminal charges, but would instead be referred to a bail court so that a judge can review and reassess the bail status and conditions of the accused.

● (1110)

The committee heard moving testimony from Dr. Rebecca Bromwich from Carleton University. She reminded us of the tragic case of Ashley Smith, who was just a teenager when she died on suicide watch at Grand Valley Prison in 2007. According to Dr. Bromwich, Ashley was in custody as a youth and had over 150 convictions for administration of justice offences, many of which did not involve harm to the public and would not have been offences had she not previously been involved with the criminal justice system. This is precisely the type of situation that the administration of justice reforms proposed in Bill C-75 seek to address.

The judicial referral hearing is a new tool that police and courts may use, in addition to the principle of restraint, to streamline minor breaches out of the court system and free up resources for more serious cases. This proposal drew strong support from organizations such as the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, Legal Aid Ontario, Aboriginal Legal Services and the Canadian Bar Association, as well as academics and private practitioners.

Last, I would like to speak to a proposal that did not get as much attention, but which some organizations and individuals acknowledged would have a positive impact for indigenous people and persons from vulnerable groups. Specifically, Bill C-75 would amend the plea provisions of the Criminal Code to require that courts be satisfied that the facts support the charge as a precondition for accepting a guilty plea. Legal Aid Ontario noted that the new process for guilty pleas would help to streamline these pleas and reduce subsequent challenges on appeal, thus contributing to reducing delays. I am confident that this proposal would provide an important mechanism for ensuring that guilty pleas are not used to further marginalize already vulnerable accused.

I believe the committee's review of this bill and the vast testimony heard strengthen an already robust piece of legislation and clarify how it responds to systemic issues. I am proud to say that we now have an even more comprehensive bill aimed at reducing delays.

I strongly support this bill. I believe it will make the criminal justice system a more efficient and effective tool for all Canadians, including indigenous people, persons from vulnerable populations, accused and victims. I urge all members of the House to support this bill.

● (1115)

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to share a quick quote. With respect to the current government's dealing with first nations indigenous programs, our Auditor General described it as an “incomprehensible failure of the federal government to influence better conditions for Indigenous people in Canada.” He went on to talk about a number of programs.

The member opposite stood and said that he likes Bill C-75 because it incorporates a principle of restraint as it relates to the circumstances of aboriginal accused or other accused from vulnerable populations when interim release decisions are made. In other words, if a police officer sees that indigenous individuals have a long record, they can bring a lesser charge or a quicker and maybe in some regard more compromised response to it. Then he cited all the different groups that supported that, which were typically indigenous groups. None of them were victims organizations or victims groups that have real concerns about this part.

Does the member believe this is another indictment on the government, in that it is looking for ways to deal with the high indigenous populations in prisons at a cost to the victims?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I mentioned at the beginning of my speech that numerous different organizations and groups had come forward, some representing indigenous communities and others representing very different fields of law throughout the country.

It became very clear from the information provided by Statistics Canada that indigenous people are more likely to enter into the criminal justice system, and that it then becomes a revolving door. I strongly believe that the provisions in this bill are going to further strengthen the ability of the court to deal with lesser offences, so we can stop that cycle and address the serious impact of this system on our indigenous people.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Madam Speaker, the status of women committee did a study last year about the experience of indigenous women in the justice system and in incarceration. We really hoped that Bill C-75 would bring in some of that advice. The government calls it a bold bill. I am afraid it is not.

I want to read something for my colleague. At committee, in December of last year, Jonathan Rudin, program director for Aboriginal Legal Services, said:

> ...mandatory minimum sentence prevents a conditional sentence from being put in....What happens then is that the person goes to jail, and if they don't have someone to look after their kids....they will lose their kids.... Even if the person gets their children back, they will have been removed from their families....that experience of being taken from your family and put into foster care....is incredibly damaging.

He also said:

> The first thing we urge the committee to recommend and to at least try to do is to have the current government bring in the legislation they have promised to bring in to restore to judges their discretion to sentence people without the burden of mandatory minimum sentences and the restrictions on conditional sentences.

Why is that not in this bold bill?

● (1120)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, as we heard from the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada earlier, it was in the minister's mandate letter to review and to provide reforms to speed up the criminal justice system. Based on the evidence and testimony that has come forward through the committee process to the House, that is exactly what the bill accomplishes

There is a time and a place to have a discussion about mandatory minimum sentences, and I am very interested in having that discussion. I do not believe the place for that is in the bill. However, the bill does strengthen the manner in which our courts are tasked to conduct certain offences, so we can have a stronger court system that ensures the most serious criminal charges are the ones that are dealt with and with the most attention that they deserve.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a real pleasure to speak to Bill C-75, an act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other acts and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

I have real concerns about the legislation, as do many stakeholders, including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

First, this is another omnibus bill, containing 302 pages of major reforms to our criminal justice system. For our constituents, that means we need to study 302 pages of legalized legislation. Similar to many other Liberal promises, this is another broken promise, as the Liberals promised not to bring forward omnibus legislation.

It also signals very clearly, the Liberals' reluctance to allow for a thorough review and debate on the modernization of the criminal justice system, including reducing court delays and judicial proceedings, an extremely important debate given the current congestion within our courts, which is resulting in serious offenders having their cases thrown out.

Second, the bill would somehow undo the mandatory victim surcharge that our Conservative government imposed in 2013 under the Increasing Offenders' Accountability for Victims Act.

The federal victim surcharge is a monetary penalty that is automatically imposed on offenders at the time of their sentencing. Money collected from offenders is intended to help fund programs and services for victims of crime.

We made this surcharge mandatory, recognizing that many judges were routinely deciding not to impose it. While we did recognize that they were doing so with some offenders who lacked the ability to pay, we believed it should be imposed in principle to signify debt owing to a victim.

Like any penalty, fine or surcharge, if people do not have the means to pay, they do not pay. However, it is the principle of the matter, and many times the guilty party does have the ability to pay some retribution to the victim.

The Conservatives strongly believe that the protection of society and the rights of victims should be the central focus in the Canadian criminal justice system rather than special allowances and treatment for criminals. This is why we introduced the Victims Bill of Rights and created the office of the victims ombudsman.

On that note, I would like to thank Sue O'Sullivan for her tremendous efforts on behalf of victims. Ms. O'Sullivan, who retired as the victims ombudsman in November 2017, had a very distinguished career in policing before being appointed to this extremely important position in 2010.

We created the ombudsman's office in 2007 to act as an independent resource for victims to help them navigate through the system and voice concerns about federal policy or legislation.

While we placed such high regard and importance on this office, the prolonged vacancy in fulfilling the position after Ms. O'Sullivan retired demonstrates very clearly what the Liberals think of the office.

In April of this year, more than four months after Ms. O'Sullivan retired, the CBC revealed the frustrations of many victims and victims advocates, including that of Heidi Illingworth, former executive director of the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime.

Ms. Illingworth said:

> ...the community across Canada feels like they aren't being represented, their issues aren't being put forward to the government of the day...Victims feel that they're missing a voice. The people we work with keep saying, why isn't somebody there? Isn't this office important? Who's speaking for victims... who's bringing their perspectives to the minister?

I would like to congratulate Ms. Illingworth for those sentiments, which I think may influence the government, and also for her appointment on September 24 as the third victims ombudsman for Canada.

Third, Bill C-75 would effectively reduce penalties for a number of what we on this side of the House, and many Canadians, deem serious offences. The Liberals are proposing to make a number of serious offences that are currently punishable by a maximum penalty of 10 years or less hybrid offences.

● (1125)

Making these hybrid offences means they can be proceeded in court by other indictment or summarily. Summary offences are tried by a judge only, are usually less serious offences and have a maximum of two years imprisonment. These hybrid offences will now include: causing bodily harm by criminal negligence, bodily harm, impaired driving causing bodily harm, participation in activities of criminal organizations, abduction of persons under the age of 14 and abduction of persons under the age of 16.

As pointed out in their testimony before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police expressed significant concern about the proposal to hybridize the indictable offences. It said:

> These 85 indictable offences are classified as "secondary offences" under the Criminal Code. If the Crown proceeds by indictment and the offender is convicted of one of these 85 offences, the Crown can request that the offender provide a DNA sample for submission to the National DNA Data Bank (NDDB).
>
> If these 85 offences are hybridized...and the Crown elects to proceed by summary conviction, the offence will no longer be deemed a "secondary offence" and a DNA Order cannot be obtained. The consequence of this will be fewer submissions being made to the NDDB. The submission of DNA samples to the NDDB is used by law enforcement to link crime scenes and to match offenders to crime scenes. Removing these 85 indictable offences from potential inclusion into the NDDB will have a direct and negative impact on police investigations.

I realize that due to the pressure exerted by the Conservatives, last night I believe, two offences, primarily the terrorism offences, have been taken out of this and it is now 83 offences with the two terrorism-related offences being removed. However, according to the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the uploading of DNA taken from 52 indictable or secondary offences, which are among those initial 85 to be made hybrid offences, resulted in 221 matches to primary offences, including 19 homicides and 24 sexual assaults. At the very least, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police is recommending that this significant unintended consequence of Bill C-75 on hybridization be rectified by listing these 85 indictable offences as secondary or primary offences so DNA orders can be made regardless of how the Crown proceeds.

We watch CSI and other programs and we see the importance of this new type of science and technology. However, now the Liberals are saying that these 85 offences are no longer important for the DNA database.

Last, I would like to talk about the intent of Bill C-75 to incorporate a principle of restraint as it relates to circumstances of aboriginal accused and other accused from vulnerable populations when interim release decisions are made.

Section 493.2 places an unreasonable onus on police officers at time of arrest to make a determination on whether an offender falls within this classification. Furthermore, and more important, it wrongly uses the criminal justice system to address the problem of overrepresentation of indigenous peoples within the criminal justice system. Instead, the government should be dealing with the socio-economic and historical generational factors that are contributing to this problem.

I, unfortunately, do not believe that the Liberal government has any intention of redressing the plight of our indigenous people in any meaningful way and will continue to fail in this regard despite its promise of reconciliation and renewed relationship.

As chair of the public accounts committee, our Auditor General came with two reports this spring. The objective of one audit was to determine whether Employment and Social Development Canada managed the aboriginal skills and employment training strategy in the skills partnership. To make a long story short, the Auditor General said that when the government was dealing with many of these programs for indigenous people, it was an incomprehensible failure.

● (1130)

It is unfortunate that the government is using this one part of Bill C-75 to address the overrepresentation of indigenous people in our penitentiaries.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I confess to being surprised that the member opposite raised the plight of indigenous people, in light of the previous government's track record on indigenous reconciliation. I find it peculiar that he is criticizing our commitment to reconciliation, with the billions of dollars we have committed to the calls to action.

The member raised the question of how it addresses victims' rights. I will tell my hon. friend. When we stop the cycle of perpetually criminalizing individuals by piling charge upon charge on them, we stop the cycle of overrepresentation. That is what this bill would try to do. That is what the member for Kingston and the Islands highlighted in terms of the administration of justice offences. By taking people out of the cycle of criminal charge after criminal charge and penal sentence after penal sentence, we avoid over-criminalizing individuals, including indigenous and marginalized communities, and we avoid the types of crimes the member opposite is so concerned about in terms of the victims he rightfully defends. We stand by those victims, as does he.

I put it to you, sir. Do you not see a link between addressing the over-incarceration and overrepresentation of indigenous people in our system and the very crimes you seek to stop occurring?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. parliamentary secretary knows full well that he is to address his questions to the Chair and not to individual members.

The hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot.

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: Madam Speaker, that is a very sad question from the member. He stated that we should look at how the Liberals have helped indigenous people, and then he said that they have put billions upon billions of dollars into it. We have a government that believes that throwing billions of dollars at a problem is going to solve it. It is not going to solve the problem. What does the hon. member suggest? He suggests that when there is charge after charge for an indigenous offender, we do not charge that person for all the offences.

With all due respect to the member and the government, I see that as an affront to victims, to the people who have been victimized by those crimes. Liberals are saying that they are going to whittle this down because they think there are too many first nations in our penitentiaries, and they do not want them to have records that are quite so long, unfortunately.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member's colleagues have stood in the House frequently to call on the government of the day to fill the vacancies for judicial appointments. As he is aware, as he was in the last Parliament with me, the Conservative government also failed to fill those vacancies and failed to respond to the pleas of the former Conservative attorney general of Alberta. I wonder if he could speak to that. There has been a languishing problem in that area for a long time.

I wonder if the member could also speak to the previous government's decision to impose minimum mandatory sentences. As the Criminal Trial Lawyers' Association has pointed out, that has been one of the major causes of clogging the courts. Why, then, is his party completely opposed to any kind of reform of that measure?

● (1135)

Hon. Kevin Sorenson: Madam Speaker, the former attorney general of Canada is sitting right here.

Very clearly, in the 10 years the Conservatives were in government, we filled those vacancies, and we filled them regularly. Yes, there were always openings, and we filled them as soon as we could. We see hundreds of vacancies now. We see very serious crimes, and criminals walking away because of those positions not being filled. That is one thing we took pride in.

This morning, the parliamentary secretary explained to us why Liberals have not filled those positions. He said it is because there is not a diverse enough population, and they want the top courts to be representative of Canada's population. It is a worthy goal, but it sounds to me like positions are not being filled because they cannot find indigenous people to fill them. I think he mentioned putting members of the LGBTQ community in judge positions. That is the reason there are so many vacancies.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleagues.

As chair of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, I am very pleased to rise to talk about our work on Bill C-75. I want to thank the members of the committee for their hard work. I also want to thank the more than 60 witnesses who appeared before our committee to share their opinion on the bill.

I also want to thank the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands, who proposed some very constructive amendments in committee, which we debated.

[*English*]

Overall, Bill C-75 is a good bill, and it is a bill the committee made better through its study. I want to talk a little about the amendments made by the committee.

The first amendment I am very pleased the committee made was to delete from the Criminal Code the provisions related to keeping a common bawdy house and vagrancy. We heard about these provisions from witnesses from the LGBTQ2+ community who came before us. My friend Robert Leckey, who was the dean at McGill, Tom Hooper and others told us that they had been disproportionately used in the 1970s and 1980s to charge, send to prison, and fine members of the gay community. For these convictions to be expunged under previous legislation the House and the Senate had adopted, we would need to have the offence under which they were charged repealed from the Criminal Code.

I salute all members of all parties, who listened to these witnesses and determined that it was only right, while these people are still alive and with us, to take action and restore a sense of fairness, a sense that they were charged with something they never should have been charged with in the first place. The members of the committee amended the bill to delete these provisions. I am very grateful, and I hope if the bill is adopted, which I imagine it will be, we will move forward quickly to adopt an order in council to allow these men to have their records expunged.

Second, we deleted the provisions in the bill related to routine police evidence and allowing police testimony to be entered by affidavit, as opposed to the police officer showing up in court. We heard from virtually all sides that this provision in the bill could easily be misunderstood and could harm those people who were trying to represent themselves in court and did not understand how to challenge the submission of routine police evidence by affidavit. We found that since any lawyer in almost any circumstance would challenge the idea that police officers did not need to show up to be cross-examined on their testimony in all matters, other than the most simple ones, this should be removed from the bill, and we have proposed to the House, in this reading, that it be removed from the bill.

We also listened carefully to those people who said that we should not hybridize the offences related to terrorism and genocide. I want to correct the record of what my colleague previously said. This was not done because the NDP and Liberal members of the committee were pushed into it by a Conservative amendment.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1140)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I just want to remind the members of the opposition that they are to wait until questions and comments to make any comments or put any questions forward.

I would ask the member for Mont Royal to continue with his speech.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, as my friend from St. Albert—Edmonton well knows, the committee had discussions long before amendments were submitted about these issues. The committee members had all put forward the proposal that genocide and terrorism be deleted. Rather than vote against the clauses, which is what the committee had originally talked about doing, the Conservatives put forward amendments to retain other language that had been amended in the clause and to delete these provisions.

I wholeheartedly agree that genocide and terrorism are easily distinguishable from the offences that are hybridized, not necessarily because they are more serious offences, although they are incredibly serious offences, but because they are offences against groups as opposed to offences against individuals. They are easily distinguishable from ordinary charges under the Criminal Code. They are ones that impact society in a way that individual cases do not. I strongly supported removing them from the list of offences to be hybridized, and I am pleased that the committee did that.

I also note that when we talk about moving forward justice, one cannot argue that the handful of terrorism and genocide offences that go before our courts are ones that will slow down the court system by remaining solely indictable offences. Therefore, I wholeheartedly supported that.

What I did not agree with was the conclusion that by hybridizing an offence, we are automatically judging that offence to be less serious. When an offence is hybridized, it gives the prosecutor the discretion to choose to move forward with either an indictable or a summary type of conviction. It is true that a summary conviction carries a maximum sentence that is generally less than the indictable one, although in some cases, by only one day. It is true that if one chooses to proceed by summary conviction, the maximum sentence is less than if it was a maximum sentence under an indictable prosecution. However, presumably, prosecutors look at the facts of a case and determine whether the facts warrant a jail sentence longer than two years less a day. If they believe that the facts of a case warrant a jail sentence longer than two years less a day, they proceed by indictment.

By the way, there are many serious offences in the Criminal Code, such as assault, that are already hybridized. There is no weakening of the offence. There is no saying that an offence is less serious by agreeing that this type of offence could have different facts leading to a need to hybridize.

For example, an incredibly serious offence in the Criminal Code, one we would all agree is incredibly serious, is kidnapping someone under the age of 16. That is one of the offences that would be hybridized under this bill. However, we also understand that there can be terrible people out there who try to kidnap or solicit young people under 16 for the purpose of trafficking or for the purpose of seizing them away to commit crimes against them.

There can also be a situation where a non-custodial parent takes his or her own child to visit grandparents, against the will of the custodial parent. That is still kidnapping a child under the age of 16. Even though it is serious and a crime, to me it warrants a very different sentence than the person taking the 16-year-old for trafficking.

I also note that there were other offences, such as branding of cattle or stealing timber, for which there were Conservative amendments saying that we should not de-hybridize. Those offences are clearly offences that do not carry the same type of consequence, yet in the same way we could not distinguish between one and the other, we are saying that we do not need to hybridize these either.

Fourth, we made an amendment to protect students. As opposed to weakening sentences, one of the things we did was enhance summary sentences. Instead of a six-month average summary sentence, a six-month maximum, the maximum was changed to two years less a day. We actually strengthened sentences for many more offences in this country and set a general summary maximum sentence of two years less a day instead of six months. However, that would have a negative impact on students and agents who could only appear on cases that were six months or less. Therefore, we moved an amendment at committee to allow provinces to set general order in council rules that would allow different classes of agents to appear for periods of over six months. That was important.

We listened to witnesses. There are many issues in this bill that are clearly debatable and have good points on both sides, but the committee came back with a better bill.

● (1145)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the good work that the member for Mount Royal does as chair of the committee.

That being said, I take issue and respectfully disagree with his comments respecting the hybridization of offences. It is true in reference to certain offences such as stealing cattle or branding cattle, or whatever he referred to, but yes we oppose the reclassification simply on the basis that we said the government has taken a whole series of offences without any real consideration as to why Parliament treated them in the first place as indictable. Other than a handful of offences, there was really no evidence before the committee and we took the position that if the government wanted to reclassify certain offences, then it should introduce legislation focused on the reclassification with a basis or justification for doing so.

Unfortunately, that is not what the government did. It just took a bunch of offences, which is why genocide and terrorism-related offences were put into the mix. They should never have been there. I think the member would concede that, but the member mentioned there were witnesses who called on the committee not to reclassify those offences. It is true and they gave very impactful evidence, but also victims of impaired driving appeared before the committee. They pleaded with the committee not to reclassify the offence of impaired driving causing bodily harm.

We heard from witnesses that reclassifying does send a message. I wonder if the member for Mount Royal could speak to that issue.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, I want to share my hon. colleague from St. Albert—Edmonton's compliments. His intellect and his work at the justice committee is always very much appreciated.

I know what he said about the government taking groups of offences and making them hybridized. I would note as well that the amendments offered by the Conservatives did essentially the same. As he notes, there were certain offences in there that were much less serious on the face of them than others and they proposed not to hybridize them either.

On the issue of impaired driving, I agree it is an incredibly serious offence and for those whose families are affected, the victims of impaired driving, there is nothing we can say to console those people. However, my view is that prosecutors will determine based on the facts of the offence whether they proceed indictably, which they will no doubt do in most cases, or whether it should be proceeded with summarily.

I will give an example. Someone who for the third time takes alcohol, goes on the road and then hurts someone severely and puts them in the hospital for weeks, is very different from the person who takes cold medication, is not aware of its effects, and backs out of a parking lot slowly, injuring someone's ankle, and yet they are the same offence.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have had some interactions with the justice committee with the member and I know that he runs a fair and honest ship over there.

I am interested to hear him on clause 106, which is material benefit from trafficking, and clause 107, which is the destroying of documents due to trafficking. Both of those have now been turned into summary or hybrid offences. I am wondering about the logic on that. The member said there is a range and I would like to see what his opinion on the range of issues could be with those. The material benefit from trafficking seems like a very serious offence.

● (1150)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, I want to say that one thing that was desperately missing at the committee was the member for Niagara Falls who always added great weight to the committee.

As I only have a short time, I want to say again with regard to the intention of hybridizing an offence, there are many serious offences in the Criminal Code today, such as assault, that are hybridized. It is not to diminish the offence, it is simply to give the prosecutor a range of options with respect to the particular circumstances of the offence. It does not diminish the seriousness of the offence to hybridize it.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Madam Speaker, I enjoyed my work on the justice committee for these past three years. It was very rewarding and very insightful.

With respect to Bill C-75, there are sections of the bill that we, on this side, are in favour of.

One of those is the reform of intimate partner violence cases, which will basically reverse the notice of bail on someone who has been convicted of assaulting or other crimes against their partner. I like the idea because it does give better protection. There are a number of procedural changes with respect to preliminary hearings and jury selection. Again, we will continue to review those changes here and get input from people.

As we heard from my colleagues on this side, we continue to be quite concerned about the hybridization of some very serious crimes.

I think most Canadians would agree with us in the Conservative Party that there are serious crimes that are currently listed as indictable offences with a maximum of up to 10 years and that it does reflect the seriousness of those crimes. Some of those offences include, but are not limited to: participation in a riot, or concealment of identity; breach of trust by a public officer; municipal corruption; selling or purchasing offices; influencing or negotiating appointments or dealing in offices; prison breach; assisting prisoner of war to escape; obstructing or violence to or arrest of officiating clergyman; keeping a common bawdy house; causing bodily harm by criminal negligence; bodily harm; impaired driving causing bodily harm; failure to provide sample and blood alcohol level over legal limit; material benefit from trafficking; withholding or destroying documents; and abduction of person under age of 14 or under the age of 16.

I think most Canadians would agree with us that these are very serious offences. Some others are marriage to someone under the age of 16, arson for fraudulent purpose and participation in the activities of a criminal organization.

The government has backed down on a couple of those issues. They are the ones related to terrorism and genocide. The problem I have with the government is that we told them a long time ago that Canadians are not going to agree with hybridizing and reducing the possible penalties for criminal activities like genocide and terrorism. We were very clear that it is a mistake to go forward with this. It took the government a long time, approximately a year, before it would back down on this.

A piece of advice I would give to the government is that just because an idea comes from the opposition does not mean that it is a bad idea. Some time ago we started pointing out that a person who is convicted of murdering, torturing and raping a child should not be then transferred to a healing lodge. We told the government that it was a huge mistake. All we got was pushback from the government and the minister saying no.

However, I found out a few minutes ago that Terri-Lynne McClintic has been transferred out of a healing lodge and placed back in prison where she should be. All I can say to the government is that this idea is no better than it was when we told the Liberals a long time ago about these things. I had said it was a mistake to put genocide and terrorism in as hybrid offences, and again, we were right.

● (1155)

I remember, in June 2017, the government came forward with another omnibus justice bill, and part of it was to remove the protection of members of the clergy and the protection of people disrupted during a religious service. We told the government it was a mistake. I remember standing here, telling some of my colleagues to please go home this summer and ask constituents, even if they do not go to a religious service, if they think it is a good idea that we would repeal this section.

It took about a year, but then finally the government did agree with us. Unfortunately, I see that threat against a member of the clergy is now part of the hybridization, so the government has reduced the penalty for this. Again, I believe this is inconsistent.

We hear the Prime Minister and others saying we have to protect religious institutions, synagogues, churches, temples and mosques. However, at the same time, the government's record, now on two occasions, is to reduce or, in a sense, eliminate the specific penalty dealing with that. It is completely inconsistent, and I think it is a mistake.

I was going to ask my colleague a question, since he gets overwhelming support at elections and is very in tune with what his constituents say. I was going to ask, "Are any of your constituents saying that we should open up the possibility of a lower sentence for people who traffic in children under the age of 14? Did anybody say that to you, or say that we have to go easier on these people?" The hon. member says that nobody came forward to ask for that.

We talk about the challenges with respect to impaired driving. Now the government's priority this year has been to legalize marijuana. Everyone in this chamber knows that this is going to make it more complicated, with respect to impaired driving and the associated challenges. Yet, at the very same time, the government has legislation that says that if people are driving impaired and they cause bodily harm, they now have the possibility of facing a summary conviction offence, which would result in something even as low as fine. I would say that nobody wants something like that.

On the section on trafficking in persons, the justice committee is doing a study right now on human trafficking. We heard from Canadians across this country, different groups and individuals saying what a terrible problem this is and that it has to be addressed. However, at the same time, the government is reducing the penalties.

One of the things I heard from the government over a year ago, when it introduced this, was that it would speed up the criminal justice system. I say, "Sure, if you are a terrorist." If somebody says they have the possibility of getting a fine of $1,000, they will ask where they can sign up for that. That is great news for them. Let us not hold up the justice system.

My point is these are very serious crimes. They were treated as such when Conservatives were in government. As my colleagues have said, we always stood up for victims of crime to better protect victims and to increase people's confidence in the criminal justice system. When somebody who has committed a horrific crime is let off, when they get the minimum possible sentence, it does not increase people's confidence in the criminal justice system. It has the exact opposite effect.

We had a very good run at this. We stood up for law-abiding Canadians. We stood up for victims. We wanted the system to work. I am very proud of all that we have done. My advice to the government is, when the Conservatives have good ideas that the Liberal members can run by their own constituents and they agree with them, the government should adopt those, and it should not have to wait to change its mind.

● (1200)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have one brief comment and one question. I appreciate the comments from the member opposite and his experience in this matter.

I would put it to him that to question our commitment to fighting religious discrimination is puzzling in the wake of the strong position we have taken against anti-Muslim hatred, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism based on yesterday's apology in this House, and the monies we have dedicated thereto.

The member did state that he agrees with our position on intimate partner violence and victims who suffer intimate partner violence. I thank him for that. I think that is an important area of common ground.

What I would say to the member is that there are areas where other victims are also addressed in this bill. I would solicit his view on the disconnect that existed when his party was in power. There could be a consensual sexual relationship between people between the ages of 16 and 18 who are heterosexuals, and that was perfectly valid under the Criminal Code of Canada, but until this legislation, in the same situation, consenting minors in sexual activities who are 16 to 18 years old and who are part of the LGBT community would be criminalized.

This bill will change that. Would the member opposite say that is a step in the right direction? Perhaps he could elaborate as to why his government did not make that change when it was in power?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, the member said he was confused when we were talking about the protection of religious freedom. I was completely confused when I saw the bill repealing a section of the Criminal Code.

I checked the section in the Criminal Code, and the Liberals would repeal the section that specifically protects members of the clergy and people from having their religious services disrupted. I asked the question, and one of the members said that it would still be mischief if one caused a disruption at a religious service, and that if one threatened a member of the clergy, it would still be assault. I said that it was not the same thing as causing a ruckus at a hockey game or a disruption somewhere else or a fistfight at a bar. It is not the same. Even people who do not attend religious services agreed with me that this is more egregious. It is more serious if one disrupts people's right to practice their religion.

Therefore, I say to members of the government that if they want to better protect religious institutions, then make sure that the laws do not weaken those protections. Do not make it a hybrid offence for someone to go after a member of the clergy. That is a mistake and sends the wrong message.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, from the NDP side, we had hoped that this proposed legislation would repair the mandatory minimum policy change that the Conservatives brought in during the previous government.

We have heard testimony at the status of women committee about judges no longer having judicial discretion to impose sentences on an offender serving time on weekends, when the offender could get their family to look after their kids and keep the family together, and could still keep their regular job during the week. Often, in the case of women, particularly indigenous women, they may well have been an accessory to a crime and plead guilty just to get the charge over and under way, but they do not have access to good representation. There is a lot of evidence that mandatory minimums have been harder on indigenous women than anyone else and have broken up families. In fact, 68% of court challenges are related to mandatory minimums.

Have the Conservatives had any second thoughts or regrets about the decision they made in the previous Parliament? Do they wish the government had kept its promise, followed its mandate letter and included a repeal of mandatory minimums in this proposed legislation?

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, it is the role of Parliament to set guidelines for the courts.

Back in the early 1990s when I was part of the government, we introduced a bill to put stalking into the Criminal Code and make it a specific crime. I believe the maximum sentence for that was five years. However, one of my own colleagues said that maybe a judge would want to give a sentence of more than five years. Why would we limit it to five years? I said that it was our job to set guidelines for the courts, whether it is the maximum or minimum sentence. That is what we do as a Parliament.

The hon. member will ask how we can do this. For example, why would we limit it for someone who commits first degree murder and insist that it be 25 years? Again, these things reflect the seriousness of the crimes.

Here is the other thing. When a court imposes a very light sentence on someone who has committed a serious crime, it hurts people's confidence in the criminal justice system. They have a problem with that. One of the things we always wanted as a government was that people would have confidence in the criminal justice system and believe that it would do what it is supposed to, which is to hold people accountable for what they have done, to protect the public and to stand up for victims. That is exactly what we did in our 10 years, and I am very proud of our record.

● (1205)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak today to Bill C-75. Like other members of the House, I am very appreciative of the study undertaken by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and the many witnesses who gave helpful testimony on various aspects of this bill. I would like to use my time today to discuss the jury amendments proposed in Bill C-75.

As members know, jury reform is an area of shared jurisdiction. While Parliament is responsible for the criminal law and the rules in the Criminal Code setting out the legal framework for in-court jury selection, the provinces and territories are responsible for determining, for example, who is eligible for jury duty and the process by which the jury roll is compiled.

Bill C-75 proposes several reforms to the in-court jury selection process. One of the significant changes that I would like to start with is the proposal to abolish peremptory challenges.

The committee heard from several witnesses who testified on jury reforms, all of whom shared an understanding of the importance of representative juries. Their views differed on whether or not peremptory challenges contribute to or undermine that objective. However, several legal experts and advocates, and most notably Professor Kent Roach, expressed very strong support for their elimination, which would finally put an end to the discriminatory exclusion of jurors. Any tool that can be used to effectively undermine the participation on juries of persons of a particular race or ethnicity contributes to a perception of mistrust and lack of confidence in the justice system.

Jonathan Rudin, the program director for Aboriginal Legal Services, also gave compelling testimony before the committee that the use of peremptory challenges has had a corrosive impact on efforts to encourage indigenous people to act as jurors. Discrimination in the selection of juries has been documented for decades. Concerns about the discriminatory use of peremptory challenges and its impact on indigenous people being under-represented on juries were raised back in 1991 by Senator Murray Sinclair, then a judge, in the report of the Manitoba aboriginal justice inquiry. More recently, we heard from retired Supreme Court Justice Frank Iacobucci, who studied these issues in his 2013 report on first nations representation on Ontario juries.

I agree with Professor Kent Roach who, in his written brief to the committee, characterized jury reforms in Bill C-75 as being "long overdue".

Having read these reports and hearing from many experts on the topic, I am confident that Bill C-75 proposes the right approach in abolishing peremptory challenges. It is a simple and effective way to prevent deliberate discrimination and the arbitrary exclusion of qualified jury members.

Furthermore, to bring greater efficiencies to the jury selection process and to make it more impartial, the bill proposes to empower the judge to decide whether to exclude jurors challenged for cause, such as because they are biased by either the defence or the prosecution. Currently, such challenges are decided by two lay people, called "triers", who are not trained in the law. This process has been problematic, causing delays in jury trials even before they begin, and appeals resulting in orders for a new trial. The proposal would shift the responsibility for such challenges to judges who are trained adjudicators and therefore better placed to screen out impartial jurors. The proposed change reflects the recommendation made in 2009 by the Steering Committee on Justice Efficiencies and Access to the Justice System, a group established by the federal-provincial-territorial ministers of justice and comprising judges, deputy ministers of justice from across Canada, defence lawyers, representatives of the bar associations, and the police. It is also consistent with what has been done in other common law countries, such as England, Australia and New Zealand. I am confident that this change in procedure will make improvements to the overall efficiency of our jury trials.

● (1210)

There are also several proposed changes to modernize and update the challenge for cause grounds. Notably, the proposed change to reduce the number of jurors with criminal records for minor offences from being challenged and excluded for jury duty would help address concerns that excluding individuals with minor criminal records disproportionately impacts certain segments of society, including indigenous persons, as noted by Justice Iacobucci. It would also assist with improving broader participation on juries, and thus jury representativeness.

While a few witnesses before committee said they would like to see this ground removed so that anyone with a criminal record could not be challenged for cause, I am mindful of the fact that permitting a juror with a serious criminal background to serve on a jury and make the decision as to the guilt or innocence of the accused could greatly undermine public confidence in the administration of justice. I would also note that provincial and territorial jury legislation also specifies who is eligible for jury duty and is, in many respects, reflected by what is in the Criminal Code.

Bill C-75 would also allow a judge to continue a trial without the jury when the number of jurors falls below 10 and where the Crown and the accused agree. This change would promote efficiencies because it would avoid mistrials when the jury is reduced to fewer than 10 jurors due to illness or some other reason.

Another key change proposed in Bill C-75 is to allow judges to stand aside a potential juror while other jurors are selected, in order to maintain public confidence in the administration of justice, for example, to support the establishment of an impartial, representative jury. The change recognizes the important role that judges can play in improving jury selection at the outset. I believe that the use of this power, where deemed appropriate, would help improve the diversity of jurors during the in-court selection process, particularly in cases where public confidence in the administration of justice would be undermined if the jury were not more diverse.

With respect to the representativeness of juries, there is certainly work that remains to be done, especially given the important role played by both the federal government and the provinces and territories in the jury selection process. I am greatly encouraged by the fact that jurisdictions are collaborating to examine a wide range of jury-related issues, and undertaking important work to find further ways to improve our jury selection system in Canada, including to enhance representation on juries.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that the jury reforms in Bill C-75 mark critical progress in promoting fairness, diversity and participation in the jury selection process. These improvements would also enhance efficiencies, as well as public confidence in the criminal justice system.

I call on all members of the House to support this transformative bill. I thank the justice committee for its work, and the witnesses committee members heard from in bringing forward this important legislation, including the amendments they proposed.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Guelph spent much of his time addressing the issue of peremptory challenges. It was a proposal I considered very seriously, but there was a lot of evidence before the justice committee that peremptory challenges are a vital tool, including for defence counsel to use. In fact, the defence counsel and representatives of the defence bar who appeared were unanimous in calling on the committee not to move forward with eliminating peremptory challenges. In addition to that, their evidence was that it could actually increase the representativeness of juries. Consistent with that, the Supreme Court of Canada, in its Sherratt decision, stated that peremptory challenges can increase rather than diminish the representativeness of juries. Could the member comment on that?

● (1215)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for St. Albert—Edmonton for his work on the committee. As he pointed out, there was conflicting evidence at committee. However, where we have landed, namely, giving the stand-aside revisions for the justice to be able to put aside people in order to increase diversity, is really the way to go. By removing the challenges, we would be able to make sure that people are not excluded because of their race or background, and that they still are eligible and under the guidance of the judge in the final selection of the jury. It is a tool that we are giving the judges to make sure that we have diversity and representative juries.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, status of women committee heard testimony from Jonathan Rudin from Aboriginal Legal Services, who I note my colleague quoted as a defender of the legislation. Almost a year ago, having described the impact of mandatory minimum sentencing as being particularly hard on indigenous women and on having removed judicial discretion, the pattern observed was that there were more indigenous women in prison, that their families were taken away and that their children were incredibly damaged on their return, maybe even creating intergenerational impacts.

Mr. Rudin said

> The first thing we urge the committee to recommend and to try at least to do is to have the current government bring in the legislation they have promised to bring in to restore to judges their discretion to sentence people without the burden of mandatory minimum sentences and the restrictions on conditional sentences.

Does my colleague agree with Jonathan Rudin's advice in this case?

Although the government campaigned to make this change three years ago, it has done nothing. It has not fulfilled its commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action to repeal the Conservative's mandatory minimum legislation. The government had an opportunity in the bill and it has failed to meet it.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith for her advocacy on behalf of women.

What we are looking at is the principle of restraint that is being legislated here. We are looking at not imposing unnecessary conditions, but giving freedom to the judges to determine whether mandatory minimum sentences are the way to go.

The job of the judges and the judicial process is to apply the proper tools. Our job is to give them the tools from which they can choose to use, depending on an individual case and on their expertise in this matter.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as you know, I am always pleased to rise to speak to bills that mean a lot to me or bills that I am not entirely comfortable with.

Today I will be speaking to second reading of Bill C-75, an act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other acts and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

On reading this large, 302-page omnibus bill, many of my colleagues agree or might agree that this bill is quite dense and complex and that it tries to slip important changes under the radar.

I cannot help point out that it was introduced in the middle of day on the eve of Good Friday as the House was about to adjourn for a week. Nice try, whoever was trying to sneak this through, especially when three new government bills were already on the Order Paper: Bill C-28, an act to amend the Criminal Code in regard to the victim surcharge, Bill C-38, an act to amend An Act to amend the Criminal Code in regard to exploitation and trafficking in persons, and Bill C-39, an act to amend the Criminal Code in regard to unconstitutional provisions and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

Given that this bill makes a number of changes to the Criminal Code, most of my speech will focus on the amendments that, I would argue and so would many victims of crime and their loved ones, totally contradict what the Liberals say when they claim that victims are being considered, that they care about victims' rights and that they are committed to upholding those rights. The reality is a far cry from that.

The Liberals are always quick to put criminals first. It seems to be their first instinct.

We do not have to look too far to see some very recent examples of that. Consider the case of the criminal Terri-Lynne McClintic, who brutally and savagely murdered a little girl, eight-year-old Tori Stafford, yet she was transferred to a healing lodge after spending just nine years behind bars and even though she is not eligible for parole until 2031, and Tori's family was never given prior notice of the transfer.

Only after dozens and dozens of interventions in the House by the opposition parties, an open letter to the Prime Minister from little Tori's father, the arrival of many protesters on Parliament Hill, and pressure from all Canadians who found the transfer to be unacceptable, inconceivable and disrespectful did the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness finally decide to take action.

It was only yesterday, after far too many weeks of waiting and unnecessary suffering for Tori's family and because of all the public pressure in this regard, that the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness finally asked Correctional Service Canada to make the transfer policies more stringent.

However, we do not yet know whether this serious mistake has been corrected. We do not know whether Ms. McClintic is back behind bars where she should be. That is of little consolation to Tori's family and to Canadians.

The minister has apparently also asked Correctional Service Canada to improve its policies for the transfer of medium-security offenders to institutions without controlled perimeters precisely because these changes could help convince the public that our correctional system holds guilty parties responsible.

Canadians were outraged by Ms. McClintic's transfer, but above all they were extremely disappointed to see—

● (1220)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General on a point of order.

[*English*]

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point or order. With all due respect to the member opposite, she spent the last three minutes discussing matters related to the incarceration of individuals and the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, which is the purview of the Minister of Public Safety. We are dealing with Bill C-75, a matter that pertains to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada. I would ask her, through you, to direct her comments to the bill that is before the House.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary. Members will know, of course, that they are asked to ensure their comments are relevant to the matter at hand. Members also know that they are given a fairly large degree of liberty in terms of how they couch those arguments.

[*Translation*]

The member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix has used three minutes of her speaking time. I hope that she will use her remaining seven minutes to address the topic before the House.

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

● (1225)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, my colleague may want me to muzzle me, but I will continue reading my speech. I want my words to be heard; I am not here to be muzzled, I am here to speak on behalf of Canadians.

The Liberals were not doing anything and kept defending the indefensible. They said they could not do anything, but in reality, they did not want to do anything. The government could have saved this already devastated family from more hardships, but we know the sad end to this story.

The Conservatives are the voice of victims of crime and their loved ones, and we will never stand by in a case of injustice like this one. We are satisfied that this shameful issue has advanced, but we are appalled that it took so long.

We cannot forget the case of Chris Garnier, a criminal who killed a young police officer. He is currently serving his sentence and is receiving veterans benefits, even though he never served in the Canadian Armed Forces. This week is Veterans Week, which would be an appropriate time for the government to apologize and immediately correct the situation.

Speaking more specifically to Bill C-75, certain aspects can be supported in the interest of victims of crime, such as removing certain Criminal Code provisions that have been found unconstitutional; indeed, the Conservatives acknowledge that this measure will benefit victims of crime and that it will clean up the Criminal Code.

We also support higher maximum penalties where offenders have been repeatedly violent toward an intimate partner, and more importantly, we support the consideration of intimate partner violence as an aggravating factor in sentencing. For that, however, it is absolutely essential that more stringent requirements be imposed on temporary releases in the case of offenders who have committed intimate partner violence.

I think this requirement is especially important because offences related to the scourge of domestic violence are increasing steadily in Quebec. It is important to understand that spousal homicide is often the culmination of violent tendencies that increase in severity and intensity over time. In 78% of cases of spousal homicide committed in Canada between 2001 and 2011, police were aware of a history of domestic violence between the victim and the aggressor.

In far too many cases, offenders that have been arrested and subsequently released go on to kill their spouse anyway. It is crucial that conditional release provisions be strengthened in the Criminal Code; otherwise, increasingly younger innocent victims will lose their lives.

Another aspect of Bill C-75 I strongly oppose is the change to the victim surcharge. The Conservatives support victims of crime and believe that they deserve better. Bill C-75 is a reintroduction of Bill C-28, which was introduced two years ago and gives courts the flexibility to waive or reduce the victim surcharge when a person convicted of a crime convinces the court that such a payment would cause undue hardship.

On behalf of victims of crime, I feel it is my duty to vote against Bill C-75. Despite taking some steps in the right direction, it takes far too many in the wrong direction, I believe. Unfortunately, victims of crime do not yet have themselves an advocate in Canada's Liberal government.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague opposite for her comments.

After hearing her comments, I wonder if she thinks we have improved the system for victims.

[*English*]

She specifically mentioned in her comments the issue of domestic violence, conjugal violence and intimate partner violence, which is a problem throughout Canada but also in Quebec. We have made significant improvements with respect to intimate partner violence by expanding the definition, looking at dating partners and providing for harsher sentences in that context.

We are also taking steps to address something raised at the justice committee, which is that victims of sexual assault are doubly traumatized if they have to appear both before a preliminary inquiry and then a subsequent trial. By eliminating the preliminary inquiry process for sexual assault crimes, are we not addressing the very victims' needs the member opposite has just underscored in her comments?

● (1230)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite.

There has been some progress with respect to conjugal violence, but too many people are still being victimized by their intimate partners. To me, the worst thing is the lack of support for these men and women. Some women are violent toward their partner. There is not enough support, and in many cases, the offender walks free after serving just a third of their sentence.

When that offender gets out, they go looking for their ex-partner. Tragically, the result can be more serious forms of violence or murder. There is some progress, but the 309 pages I read are still shot through with grey areas. I think we have two choices. We have many choices. We can help criminals, some of whom are also victims. However, today I want to speak on behalf of victims because they are the people we are talking about. Unfortunately, they are still too often overlooked by the government.

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

She talked about the positive measures included in Bill C-75 but she said that she is going to vote against it. I would like her to tell me more specifically what she thinks is wrong with the bill.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Quebec City region.

I come from a prison background. Let me assure my colleagues that I did not spend any time in jail. My father was a prison warden and my mother was a correctional officer. My aunt was a correctional officer. My grandfather was a police chief and my cousins are police officers. I come from a family that worked in the prison system. It is a harsh environment that, to date, has always been appropriated by criminals.

This 302-page bill shows that even today, in 2018 and soon 2019, everything is done to protect criminals while little or nothing is done to protect victims of crime. It is time that changed.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about crimes against predominantly females in a domestic violence context. One of the issues we have real concerns with is the watering down of sentences, including for the offence of administering date rape drugs, from as much as 10 years to two years less a day.

Could the member speak to that provision of Bill C-75 and the impact of that change, namely that offenders who were prosecuted by way of summary conviction for administering a date rape drug could not have a DNA order so they would be in the DNA national database?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. He is quite right.

In my opinion, Bill C-75 does not go far enough. It makes some strides, but only small ones. It is time for all Canadian governments at all levels to put themselves in the shoes of victims of crime, who have to deal with criminals day after day with no way to protect themselves.

Our government put in place the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights, which specifies that, when an offender gets out of prison, the parents of the victim must be informed. In many instances that does not happen, and in my opinion, it shows a lack of judgment. That should have been included in Bill C-75.

● (1235)

[*English*]

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise to speak to Bill C-75, an act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other acts and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

Before I begin, I would like to thank the Minister of Justice and the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights for their work on this legislation, which is now at report stage. It really would address some of the issues of delay in our court system. It would reinforce and strengthen our criminal justice system to ensure that victims would be looked after in a way that would protect them, our communities and society and. At the same time, it looks at the inequities within the system.

Before I go any further, I will quote Bryan Stevenson, a lawyer in the United States. I have read his book *Just Mercy* and one line reads, "Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done." I started with that quote because I want lay some context.

I have listened to hon. opposition members speak to the bill. I want to re-emphasize that our objective is not to revictimize innocent people, but to ensure they are adequately protected. We know there are inequities in the system and the bill looks to improve the efficiency of and equity within the system.

There have been many reports, and it is not just me saying this, about the over-incarceration of our indigenous and black populations within federal institutions across the country. Irrespective of where we are, we see this happening.

I am not a lawyer and this is not my background, but in looking at the legislation, I want people in Whitby to know and understand what the legislation would do to strengthen our criminal justice system, the Criminal Code and increase efficiencies. By doing both, it would increase efficiency.

Bill C-75 proposes to do a few things: modernize and streamline our bail system, including by legislating a principle of restraint to reduce the imposition of unnecessary conditions and with the intended effect of reducing the overrepresentation of indigenous and marginalized Canadians in our criminal justice system. Essentially, when bail conditions are imposed, the proposal is to look at the situation of the individuals in front of the judge and come up with reasonable conditions that would prevent them from re-entering the criminal justice system. By doing that, we would ensure it would not be a revolving door in and out of prison. We want people to be rehabilitated and stay out of the system, but there has to be a thoughtful process throughout the whole judicial system to ensure that happens.

A second proposal is to change the way our system deals with administration of justice offences, including by creating new judicial referral hearings as an alternative to a new criminal charge, with the goal of reducing the burden of administrative justice charges and increasing court efficiency. If an alcoholic is in front of a judge and one of the conditions imposed by the judge is that the person not drink, that is a little unreasonable. Why not have one of the conditions be that the individual seeks treatment? That is a better alternative than telling that person not to drink. Allow individuals to seek treatment and make it part of their conditions so they do not come back before the court. It would prevent that revolving door and increase efficiency.

● (1240)

Another proposal is to strengthen the way our criminal justice system responds to intimate partner violence, including enhancing the reverse onus at bail for repeat offenders. If charged with an offence, it is not up to the prosecution but rather to the defendant to present evidence for why he or she should be released. This makes it harder for the person to reoffend, and it protects the victim. It should be up to the individual to tell the court why he or she will not offend again. It should not be up to the prosecution to do that. It broadens the definition of intimate partner violence to include dating partners and former partners, and it increases the maximum sentence for intimate partner violence.

Another reform is the reform to jury selection processes. This legislation proposes reform by including the abolition of peremptory challenges, reinforcing the power of judges to stand aside certain jurors in order to increase the diversity of the jury selection. That does not mean the person will not have the opportunity to be a juror; it just means that in order to increase the diversity of the jurors who are selected as a jury of our peers, they should reflect those who are living in the community. That component allows for judges to have the authority to do that. Jurors cannot be removed without reason. They cannot be indiscriminately removed; there has to be a reason for that. This also helps to allow and increase equity within our system.

This piece of legislation also restricts the availability of preliminary inquiries to only those offences carrying the maximum penalty of life imprisonment, with the intended effect of reducing the time it takes for each case to go to trial. We know that the introduction of this proposal will allow us to understand what victims go through. We are not revictimizing witnesses by having them testify at the peremptory and also at the trial. It increases efficiency while also, as I mentioned earlier, ensuring that the victim is not further victimized within the system.

I want to talk about the hybridized offences, and a few people may want an explanation as to what this is. There are three ways in which we can convict. There are summary convictions, indictable offences and hybrid offences. The fact that we are increasing the number of hybrid offences does not mean the Crown does not have the ability to decide the appropriate sentence or look at the seriousness of the offence.

My hon. colleague from St. Albert—Edmonton has brought this up a number of times. He is a civil litigator, and during his speech he said we cannot just leave it up to the Crown somewhere in some building to have the ability to indiscriminately sentence. I am sure he has faith in the ability of his colleagues, and I would hope he would know that these lawyers take their job very seriously. Not taking away their ability to decide the seriousness of a crime means they can still go in either direction, whether people are given a fine, or two years, or two years to life. That possibility is still available to our attorneys.

This is certainly not what it is doing. It is not being soft on crime. In addition to these proposals, our Minister of Justice has made significant numbers of appointments. Last year there were over 100 appointments to the bench. We are currently at 235. We are on track this year to keep that number going.

● (1245)

We have the most diversity on the bench. We have judges who look like Canadians. That combination of appointments, plus the proposals in here, increases the equity in our system, and it increases the efficiency of our system.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member for Whitby a question about hybridization and how it will make the justice system more efficient, which is the basis upon which the government claims it is reclassifying or hybridizing offences.

The effect of hybridization is that more cases will be prosecuted by summary conviction. That means they go down to be prosecuted at the provincial court level, rather than at the superior court level. We know that 99.6% of cases are already prosecuted at provincial courts.

In addition to that, from the standpoint of the Jordan decision, which imposed timelines wherein a delay is deemed presumptively unreasonable, the burden rests on the Crown to justify the case continuing. As such, it is 30 months in superior court and it will be 18 months in provincial courts. Not only is the government downloading cases, but it is reducing the timeline to prosecute by about half.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Mr. Speaker, to reiterate, summary cases have fewer procedural aspects. They move much more quickly through the system. They do not need as many procedures, and they increase the efficiency within our justice system.

However, I would like to talk specifically about hybridization and to look at, for example, an issue that the hon. colleague has brought up before in this House, which is making incidents such as kidnapping a hybrid offence.

I have three kids. When we look at kidnapping, it could either be someone who stands outside of a school luring kids into their van and saying, "I am going to take you away and kidnap you," or it could be a custody case in which a child says, "I don't want to live with mom anymore. I am going to run away and go stay with dad," and mom calls the police. Both of these fall under the same classification, which is kidnapping.

However, those two cases are not the same. The Crown has the ability within that context to look at those two cases of kidnapping and classify which is the more serious offence that requires a lifetime in prison, and which requires two years or less.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to briefly address preliminary inquiries.

Preliminary inquiries are, in essence, dress rehearsals for subsequent trials, and they are only used in 3% of cases. Therefore, eliminating these is not really going to save a lot of time. Sometimes, during these preliminary inquiries, the Crown's case can collapse entirely and one does not end up having to hold a much longer trial.

Critics also claim that their elimination can limit the rights of the accused to fully comprehend the case against them, and may increase wrongful convictions. In fact, the Canadian Bar Association said:

> Bill C-75 would restrict preliminary inquiries to offences with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. This would not reduce court delays and would negatively impact the criminal justice system as a whole. As lawyers who practice in Canada's criminal courts every day, we know the practical value of preliminary inquiries to the criminal justice system.

I am interested in what the member would have to say to the Canadian Bar Association on preliminary inquiries.

● (1250)

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes: Mr. Speaker, I would start by saying that I do not purport to be a lawyer or to speak for members of the Canadian Bar Association in the way they speak among themselves about this particular reform.

The proposals in Bill C-75 would restrict the availability of preliminary inquiries to only those offences carrying the maximum penalty of life in prison, with the intended effect of reducing the time it takes for cases to reach trial.

Among other things, this looks at the witnesses and the revictimization of individuals who, at the inquiry and again at trial, have to go through their testimony and some of the very difficult circumstances of what happened to them. That can be a very painful and excruciating process.

When we look at limiting those to offences that carry a maximum penalty of life in prison, we are ensuring that we take into consideration some of the issues my colleague is talking about with regard to having the witnesses there to testify to those very serious offences.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise to speak to Bill C-75.

We have waited long and hard for these omnibus changes to the Criminal Code, and a number of the changes have been welcomed by our party. Regrettably, a number of changes that could have been made, and that were promised by the Liberals, have not been made. That is deeply disappointing not just to us, but to Canadians and the lawyers who represent them when they end up before the courts.

Many of the reforms and the calls for reform have come from the Supreme Court of Canada's decision in the Jordan case, which many members have spoken about here. That decision put in place a new framework and timeline on the necessity of processing trials through the courts with the intention of trying to resolve the backlog of cases. Many of the impacted cases have involved very serious offences, but charges are simply being dropped because the cases have not proceeded expeditiously, consistent with the charter of rights, and in accordance with the new timelines imposed by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Former Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin two years back admonished the government in saying that "The perpetual crisis of judicial vacancies in Canada is an avoidable problem that needs to be tackled and solved." This has been the focus of a lot of debate in this place in the nine years I have been elected. Repeated calls by the opposition to the then Conservative government are now continuing with the Liberal government to fill those vacancies.

There are other measures that can be taken, some of which have been taken by the current government, to try to address the backlog in the courts and to ensure that justice is done. However, there are a number of significant measures that the justice minister was apparently mandated to undertake and chose not to do, at least not at this time, but maybe after the next election, which is usually the reason given.

Judicial appointments are seen as one solution to the backlog. Other possible solutions have been requested and, as mentioned, not adopted in Bill C-75, despite the calls by my colleague, the New Democrat justice critic, the MP for Victoria. His calls have been drawn from the testimony of experts in the field, including the Criminal Trial Lawyers' Association.

I am a member from Alberta, and in the nine years I have been here, there have been calls by the attorney general of my province for judicial vacancies to be filled, which is the prerogative of the federal government. Hundreds of cases have been thrown out because of the failure to fill vacancies across the country. There is an appreciation that some of those vacancies have been filled, particularly since this past April. However, as I have noted, these calls were made by the opposition to the then Conservative government and the calls now continue to the Liberal government. My Province of Alberta has been calling for federal action to fill these judicial vacancies and is pleased that some action is being taken, but I do want to credit my own provincial government for taking action.

The Canadian Bar Association has criticized the government for the chronic failure to appoint judges, in some cases with a delay of more than a year. As I mentioned, I commend the Alberta government for its action in filling vacancies and creating new positions in the provincial courts "to ensure Albertans have more timely and representative access to justice." It has also appointed additional clerks and prosecutors to ensure that the cases proceed more expeditiously.

I particularly wish to point out some of the recent appointments made by the Government of Alberta. In April of this year, Judge Karen Crowshoe, the first indigenous woman called to the Alberta Bar Association, became the first female first nation provincial court judge. Also, in this week alone, the Alberta court appointed Judge Cheryl Arcand-Kootenay, who is now the third first nation woman appointed to the provincial court. Moreover, Judge Melanie Hayes-Richards was appointed to the Edmonton Criminal Court. Finally, Judge Michelle Christopher was appointed as the first female judge in the judicial district of Medicine Hat in the history of our province. Kudos to the Government of Alberta.

● (1255)

There are a number of solutions that could have been taken in Bill C-75 that were not taken. For example, my colleagues have consistently called for the government to cease charging Canadians for the simple possession of small amounts of cannabis. All of those charges, the tens of thousands of Canadians charged for simple possession, have clogged our courts. We could have simply resolved that, even in the past year when the government made it clear that it was going to legalize cannabis, by stopping those criminal charges. However, it chose not to, and so the courts remain clogged.

In addition, there have been a lot of calls, including by Moms Stop the Harm, to address opioid addiction. They have been calling for the decriminalization of small amounts of opioids for personal use and to address it as a mental health challenge. Again, those charges could reduce time in our courts.

On preliminary inquiries, a number of my colleagues in this place have talked to the concerns about the government deciding in Bill C-75 to remove the opportunity for preliminary inquiries. The government has professed that this removal would make the judicial process more efficient, but as has been mentioned, it is a very small percentage, 2% to 3%, of cases that ever go through preliminary inquiry. Obviously, it would not have a substantial effect in reducing the clogging of the courts.

There has been concern at the Canadian Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers that this may pose a serious risk of more wrongful convictions. We have to remember why we have preliminary inquiries. It was mentioned previously that in some cases, as a result of a preliminary inquiry, the charges are dropped. It is a good opportunity for the defence to review the evidence by the Crown. It is concerning that while the government continually likes to use the word "balance", the bill is not adequately balancing greater efficiency in the courts and the protection of the rights of the accused.

I would also like to speak to the issue of mandatory minimum sentences, which has been discussed a lot in this place. Based on a lot of expert witnesses testimony at committee, my colleagues are expressing great disappointment that removal of mandatory minimum sentences was not addressed in this 300-page omnibus criminal justice bill. They are disappointed that it was not dealt with, particularly as dealing with mandatory minimums was specifically prescribed in the mandate letter of the justice minister. It seemed logical that this would included in this omnibus bill. Many remain puzzled as to why there is a delay on that. Is it going to be yet another Liberal promise that is delayed until the next election? It is a solution that could genuinely address the clogging of the courts, and we encourage the government to move forward more expeditiously and table a measure on that before we recess for the next election.

Many expert witnesses at committee, including the Criminal Trial Lawyers Association, recommended taking action on these measures introduced by the Harper government. This is a significant factor clogging the courts. The association said:

> Mandatory minimum sentences frustrate the process of resolving cases by limiting the Crown's discretion to offer a penalty that will limit the Crowns ability to take a position that will foster resolution before trial.

We have been told that the effect has been to increase the choice to go to trial rather than pleading to a lower charge. That is because of the necessity by that law that a minimum penalty will be imposed. Therefore, many who are charged will then say they will go to court and try to beat the rap, because otherwise they may receive a greater sentence. That has really clogged the courts.

I quote Jonathan Rudin of the Aboriginal Legal Services, who has emphasized the need to restore judicial discretion, particularly for indigenous women, as the Liberals promised. He said:

> ...we have to look at the fact that there are still mandatory minimum sentences that take away from judges the ability to sentence indigenous women the way they would like to be sentenced. There are still provisions that restrict judges from using conditional sentences, which can keep women out of prison.

I look forward to questions and could elaborate further then.

● (1300)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her contributions to the House and to her community. I will confess to finding some of her comments about appointments a little surprising. Clearly, when we have to overhaul an entire appointments process, it takes some time to get it right.

However, in overhauling that process, we have shifted from a situation in which 30% of the appointees under the previous government were women to a situation in which 57% are now women. Twelve per cent of the appointments have been from racialized groups, 6% from the LGBTQ community, and 3% from indigenous peoples. Two hundred and thirty people have been appointed across the country, including 34 in the province the member represents.

Does she share our view that we strengthen the administration of justice when that justice is delivered by a bench that reflects the community it appears before?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, of course I agree with that suggestion, but what I find stunning is that when I visit the law school in my constituency at the University of Alberta, I see that a large majority of the students are women. When I graduated a huge number of graduates were women.

It is not that we do not have qualified women. It is not that we do not have qualified indigenous lawyers. It is not that we do not have people from all kinds of racial backgrounds. What it is, is a poor excuse for the delay in the appointment of judges.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do want to touch upon judicial appointments.

Under the present minister's watch, we have seen a record number of judicial vacancies. As the member pointed out, months went by when the minister failed to appoint a single judge. The situation became so acute that former Chief Justice Neil Wittmann spoke out in the spring of 2016.

The member is quite right. The provincial government did respond by way of order in council by establishing 10 new judicial posts in October 2016.

The federal government says it is a priority to fill judicial vacancies, but it did not get around to filling one of them until a year later when my former colleague Grant Dunlop was appointed to the Court of Queen's Bench.

It seems that the government's record does not match its rhetoric in taking the situation of judicial vacancies seriously.

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned during questions to other colleagues, when the Conservative Party was in power, it was also chastised by provincial attorneys general for the delay in appointments. I think both bear the responsibility and I see no reason whatsoever for not proceeding. We have many qualified lawyers in this country.

It is not the only solution. Appointment to the courts is important. We need more prosecutors. We could also reduce the number of cases going forward if we took some of the measures that we recommended, for example, simply referring a lot of people who are addicted to opioids to mental health and other supports instead of charging them. There are many solutions.

A lot of people in court are not represented because they cannot afford it. The government should step up to the plate and provide more money for legal aid.

● (1305)

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree completely with my hon. colleague's comments on more treatment and less criminalization of those who are addicted to opioids.

My question is regarding the criticism of our continued prosecution of people for simple possession of cannabis before we legalized it. Our plan was to legalize and strictly regulate cannabis. To stop charging people would basically lead to de facto legalization without any of the regulations in place.

Does the hon. member think that we should have had de facto legalization before we had the regulatory regime in place?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, we are talking here about changes to the Criminal Code. Our party was very clear. We have long called for the decriminalization of simple possession, which could have been done in the first year the government was in office. We could have avoided tens of thousands of charges against Canadians who now probably cannot cross the border as a result.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what a pleasure it is once again to rise and share some thoughts on what is a very important issue.

This is a very comprehensive piece of legislation we have before us. It will modernize our criminal justice system. There are a lot of positive changes here. I must say that I am a bit surprised that the Conservatives continue to find ways to be critical of such good, progressive legislation. I hope to be able to highlight where I think that is somewhat misplaced.

We talked a lot in the last federal election about the importance of keeping our communities safe, protecting victims, and ultimately, holding offenders accountable for their actions. What we have before us today is legislation that would do all three. That is why I stand today with enthusiasm and highly recommend that members, particularly the opposition members, look again at what it is this government is doing with respect to making our communities safer, protecting victims, and holding offenders more accountable. Those are three aspects of this legislation that I believe need to be taken into consideration when people choose to vote in favour or against this legislation.

I compliment the minister on the fine work she has done with respect to working with the different stakeholders. When we think of our justice system, our court process and law enforcement, it is not just one level of government that is responsible for all of it. We are dependent on ensuring that there is a high sense of co-operation, discussion, and dialogue with provincial and territorial entities and indigenous people, in particular. There are many other stakeholders beyond those I have just referred to that need to be taken into consideration and listened to.

I believe that the legislation we have before us today is very reflective of what Canadians want to see and the discussions that came out of the numerous consultations with the department. I am happy to say that when the minister brought in the legislation, she made it clear in some of the debates we had that we were open to amendments, and we did receive amendments at the committee stage. The committee did some outstanding work, I must say. Through that process, the government even accepted amendments that were not government amendments, contrary to the days of Stephen Harper, when amendments brought by opposition members were never respected. We recognized that there were some positive amendments from the opposition and got behind and supported them. Therefore, it seems to me that the system worked quite well.

I started off by talking about the election. The discussions members of this House had when they met with the electorate were very keen on the issue of crime and safety and what it was Canadians expected of this government. That is why we have this progressive piece of legislation before us today. There were commitments made. We commented that we would bring in comprehensive criminal justice reform. We talked about the importance of intimate partner violence and what it is we might be able to do with respect to that.

This legislation is yet another example of one of many pieces of legislation this Prime Minister and this government have brought to the floor of the House that fulfills another commitment to Canadians in the last federal election. I believe that Canadians would be happy with the fact that we are addressing the commitments that we know are important to them, so let us talk about some of those changes.

● (1310)

My friends in the Conservative Party seem to have a difficult time with the issue of hybridization. We have summary convictions and we have indictable convictions. There is a list that would allow a crime to be considered indictable or summary.

My colleague made reference to kidnapping, and that is an excellent example. To get a sense of what it is the Conservatives are actually opposing, I will use the example of kidnapping.

There are many lawyers in every region of the country who will be able to tell people about the negative consequences of a family breakdown and a custody situation. I would ask members to put themselves in the position of a 12-year-old child who has a mom and dad living apart. Maybe it is the mom who has custody of the child. That child is having a rough day or possibly even a pretty bad week and decides to give the other parent a call to say, “I don't want to be here. Come and pick me up. I'm really upset. I'm going to run away”, or whatever that child might actually say.

The other parent maybe meets the child somewhere or somehow accommodates that child at his or her home or maybe drops the child off at the grandparents' place. Technically, that is kidnapping, and kidnapping is a very serious charge. Surely to goodness people who might be following the debate would recognize that this is quite different from someone who preys on a child who is walking out of a schoolyard, who throws that child into a van and then maybe does something horrific or decides to hold that child for ransom or put that child in a dangerous situation, such as prostitution.

What we are saying is that there are two extremes, and there is a lot in between. Hybridization allows the opportunity for discretion. That is only one aspect of what I like about this legislation. There are many other things I could be talking about.

I made reference to intimate partner violence. We need to realize that it is not just common law relationships or marital relationships. It could be a dating relationship where there is that sense of intimacy and violence. Victims really need to be given extra consideration. That is taking place here.

I like the idea that we are providing the opportunity to get rid of preliminary trials. That is a positive thing. Let me give a specific example. Imagine someone who is a victim of a sexual assault. As opposed to having to go through a preliminary trial and relive that nightmare, there could be no preliminary trial. There would just be the trial. I see that as a good thing.

My New Democratic friends previously said that it is a small percentage of overall court cases. That is not true. While it is true that it might be a smaller percentage, we are talking about thousands of cases. Imagine the impact on court times.

This legislation would do so much more to reform our system. It is good news for Canadians, and that is why I would recommend that all members of this House rethink their position and get on side with the Prime Minister, the cabinet and this government and support this legislation.

● (1315)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a couple of the phrases my colleague used in his speech were "progressive legislation", "keeping our communities safe", "protecting victims", and "reflective of what Canadians want to see". He said that this is reflective of what Canadians want to see.

We know that this bill proposes to reduce the sentences for at least 25 offences, some of them very serious. For which of these five or six offences did he hear from his constituents that they wanted sentences reduced? Would it be for obstructing or violence to or arrest of an officiating clergyman? Would it be for impaired driving causing bodily harm or death? Would it be for extortion by libel, or arson by negligence or participation in activities of a criminal organization? For which of these offences, which would have their sentences reduced, has he heard from his constituents that they want these sentences reduced?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, let me go back to something I know my constituents like about this legislation, which is a specific example I have given. Imagine a physically or sexually assaulted victim who would now not have to go through a preliminary trial. It means that victims would not have to relive that nightmare of an event. I can tell the member that 99% or more of people would support that sort of initiative within this legislation. This is legislation the Conservative Party has opposed, and on other hand, it is trying to say that it stands up for victims. Conservatives should give their collective heads a shake and get behind this legislation, because it is in the best interest of the victims.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Beloeil—Chambly, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to make one correction. My colleague tried to claim that the NDP is worried about preliminary hearings because this measure would not really reduce delays in the justice system and because, ultimately, there are not enough hearings to create delays. This was certainly one point that came up.

However, in essence, our major concern is what we heard from defence lawyers in committee. They explained their concerns that, without preliminary hearings, it would not be possible to identify the cases in which the accused is, in the end, actually innocent and should not have been charged.

Eliminating the preliminary hearing process will mean that people who are not guilty will end going to trial. The conviction rate for people who are not guilty will go up.

What does my colleague think about that? Is he not worried about eliminating this essential step to preventing false convictions in a system where vulnerable Canadians are already overrepresented?

● (1320)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that if he were to review some of his colleague's comments, he would find that some of them have tried to give the impression that trying to limit the use of preliminary hearings would not really reduce the amount of court time. From a percentage perspective, yes, preliminary hearings are a relatively small percentage of the overall cases that go before the courts, but we are talking about thousands and thousands of hours.

When we look at the legislation as a whole, there are many efficiencies in it that would ensure that we have a more efficient system. It is not just about having an efficient system, it is about assisting in making our communities safer and ensuring that there is accountability for offenders. This legislation would improve all aspects, and the bottom line is that we would have safer communities as a direct result.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to allow my colleague to go back to the comments of the member for Kitchener—Conestoga. He said, and I do not think he was trying to mislead the House, that this piece legislation would reduce the sentences for a number of different offences.

Again, we would not be taking away the ability of the Crown, the prosecution, to classify whether an offence would go to summary or indictment. The Crown would still have the opportunity to look at a case and see whether that offence was serious enough to have life or a couple of years. I would love to give my hon. colleague the opportunity to correct the possible mistake my hon. colleague made.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague raising that issue, but I am not going to be as harsh on the member, because he is talking about the Conservative spin. That is all part of the Conservative spin on the legislation. It does not have to be true, they Conservatives just use it because those are types of hit points or media lines they are trying to circulate to Canadians. It does not have to be true, but they still feel obligated to say it.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I would draw your attention to the unparliamentary language. The member is basically accusing me of lying. He is saying that it does not have to be true. If it is not true, it is lying. I take objection to that and ask you to correct it.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his point of order. The words "true" or "not true" are expressed from time to time. Depending on the context of how they are used, unless it is quite evident the member is suggesting that a person was deliberate in expressing an untruth, particularly another member, that is when it would cross the line into unparliamentary language. I do not think that was the case on this occasion.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner.

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the Liberal government's justice reform bill, Bill C-75. If the parliamentary secretary was worked up during his presentation, I cannot wait until he hears what I have to say. Sadly, I cannot find a lot of good things to report about the bill, to report to my constituents or to Canadians at large.

Like a number of the Liberal government's legislative measures, the purpose of the bill does not always match to what the bill would actually do.

For example, recently in Bill C-71, the Minister of Public Safety used tragic shootings and a gun and gangs summit to suggest he was putting forward legislation that would tackle illegal guns, gangs and violent criminals. The sad reality was that the legislation he proposed never once mentioned gangs or organized crime. It had nothing to do with illegal weapons and crimes caused by them.

Prior to that, the Minister of Public Safety also introduced Bill C-59, a bill he claimed would strengthen our national security and protect Canadians. Again, the reality was very different, as the bill would move nearly $100 million from active security and intelligence work, which actually protects Canadians, to administrative and oversight mechanisms and functions. Worst of all, the Minister of Public Safety made full claim about moving Bill C-59 to committee before second reading to:

> I would inform the House that, in the interests of transparency, we will be referring this bill to committee before second reading, which will allow for a broader scope of discussion and consideration and possible amendment of the bill in the committee when that deliberation begins.

When it came time to consider reasonable, bold or small amendments, the Liberals on that committee fought against everything to ensure the bill did not change at all its scope or scale. The results will place the security of Canadians at greater risk and for those who actually work in national security, more people will be looking over their shoulders, tougher rules, more paperwork and few, if any, benefits, as front-line efforts to protect Canadians only become more difficult.

Now, under Bill C-75, we see the same old story. The justice minister made bold claims that she would be helping address the backlog of cases created when the Supreme Court imposed a maximum time frame for them. Some of her claims included that this legislation would improve the efficiency of the criminal justice system and reduce court delays. She said that it would strengthen response to domestic violence. It would streamline bail hearings. It would provide more tools for judges. It would improve jury selection. It would free up court resources by reclassifying serious offences.

That sound fantastic. What a great bill. Streamlining the courts, strengthening the justice system, domestic violence, improving tools for judges, improving jury selection? Incredible. Sadly, the Liberals are not achieving any of these objectives according to the legal community or any of the knowledgeable leaders in the House.

Does it shorten trials and ensure that we deal with the backlog? The minister appears to make the claim that it will with the elimination of most preliminary hearings. Preliminary hearings, according to the legal community, account for just 3% of all court time. Therefore, with an overloaded court system, eliminating a huge number of these hearings will only have a minimal impact at best. Preliminary hearings often weed out the weakest cases, which means more cases will go to trial, thus increasing the court backlogs under the current legislation. What can also happen with preliminary hearings is that they create opportunity for the defence to recognize the need to seek early resolution without a trial.

Moreover, preliminary hearings can deal with issues up front and make trials more focused. Instead, under this new legislation, many cases would be longer with added procedural and legal arguments.

One member of the legal community called the bill "a solution to a problem that didn't exist". High praise for this legislation indeed.

It is the changes to serious criminal offences that have many Canadians, not just the legal community, concerned. All members of the House could agree, or at least accept, that not all Criminal Code issues need to be treated in the same manner. Serious offences like homicide and minor offences like vandalism or property damage do not meet the same threshold for punishment. We can all agree with that.

● (1325)

Canadians expect that Ottawa, that government will create safe communities and that the law benefits all people, not slanted in favour of criminals.

Under Bill C-75, the Liberals have provided the option to proceed with a large number of violent offences by way of summary conviction rather than an indictable offence. This means that violent criminals may receive no more than the proposed 12 months in jail or a fine for their crimes, a slap on the wrist for things like impaired driving causing bodily harm, obstructing justice, assault with a weapon, forced marriages, abduction, participation in a criminal organization and human trafficking. There are many more, but it bears taking the time to look at these in particular. These are serious offences. Allowing these criminals back on the street, with little to no deterrents, makes even less sense. These serious criminal issues should have the full force and effect of the law.

None of these scenarios, victims or society are better served when those responsible for these offences serve only minimal jail sentences or receive fines.

The principle is that Canadians expect that their government and the courts will be there to ensure that criminals receive due punishment for their crimes and that law-abiding Canadians and those who have been victimized by these criminals are treated fairly and with respect. In short, the bill undermines the confidence of Canadians in our criminal justice system and makes it more difficult for law enforcement to ensure safe communities. As my colleagues have clearly pointed out already, there are other solutions, better solutions in fact. The minister could address the backlog with more judicial appointments, as an example.

As the former minister of justice said, there was never a shortage of qualified candidates in his six years as minister of justice. Therefore, it is not a failure of the judiciary. It is not that there are too many preliminary hearings. It is not that there are way more criminals, because crime rates overall have been declining. The problem resides almost entirely with the minister getting more people on the bench and in prosecution services.

As I have said in the House before, public safety and national security should be the top priority of the House. It should be above politics so the safety and security of Canadians are put ahead of political fortunes. While the Liberals have said that public safety is a priority, they have said that everything is their "top priority". To have 300 top priorities, means they have no priorities at all.

Canadians expect that the government will make them its priority. Sadly, the bill fails the test to keep Canadians safe and deliver effective government. The legal community has said that the bill is deeply flawed and will hurt the legal system rather than help it. Police services will likely see themselves arresting the same people over and over again, even more so than they do today, as criminals get lighter sentences or fines. Therefore, the backlog will move from the courts to the policing community, back to the courts and then back to the policing community. How does that help the average Canadian?

Canada has been weakened by the Liberal government. Its wedge politics on the values test, pandering to terrorists, ignoring threats from China, targeting law-abiding guns owners, its lack of leadership on illegal border crossers and waffling on resource development continue to put Canadians at a disadvantage, weaken our public safety and national security and place undue strain on families and communities.

Canadians deserve better. In 2019, I suspect we will get a better justice minister, a better justice bill and a better government.

● (1330)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will put to the member opposite something similar to what I addressed to the NDP member from Alberta. When we inherit a flawed process, it takes time to perfect it. That flawed process of judicial appointments highlighted by the member opposite produced a situation where 30% of the country's judicial appointments were women. The process we put in place, which is merit based, inclusive and venerates personal lived experience, has produced a process which has resulted in 57% of appointments being women, 12% being members of racialized communities, 6% being people from the LGBTQ community and 3% being indigenous individuals.

Does the member opposite believe and agree, when we have made 230 appointments thus far, 34 in his own province, that the administration of justice and confidence in the administration of justice is enhanced, not diminished, when a bench metes out justice that reflects the communities coming before that bench?

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Speaker, one has to debate whether or not the system of appointing judges was flawed in the first place. Second, it took the government a full year to stand up its judicial advisory committee.

If we wonder why we have a backlog in our system, it is because the government "drug" its feet. The government did nothing. It did not think it needed to. Now, we are paying the consequences for that. That evidence rests on its own merits.

● (1335)

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during my colleague's speech, he talked about knowledgeable leaders in this House. The person sitting right in front of him, the member for St. Albert—Edmonton, is a lawyer. I would think he would have confidence in lawyers and their ability to handle justice across Canada.

The member also said that Canadians expect that people will receive due punishment for their crimes. To be clear, we are not removing the ability for prosecution lawyers, such as the member sitting in front of my hon. colleague, to look at an offence and decide the seriousness of that offence, and to then decide whether it is to be a summary conviction or whether it should be indictable. We are not taking that away.

We are not reducing sentencing for serious crimes. We are giving the prosecution, much like many of my hon. colleagues' friends and colleagues, the ability to decide, which we know they will do in a just and effective way in order to look at who is before them, and give them the right punishment.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder to all hon. members, before we go to the hon. member, that we try to stay away from making reference to the presence or absence of members in the House.

The hon. member for Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner.

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I have heard from the legal community about this bill is that it does water down sentences, even though the rhetoric on the other side does not admit that, but it also takes away the ability for judges to have the discretion to manage their cases in the manner in which they need to. It puts that onus on the prosecutors, without a lot of transparency.

It is unfortunate that it does that. I think over time, if this bill should pass in its current form, and those in the legal community have warned us about this, we will see this begin to happen and it will have detrimental effects.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member touched upon hybridization.

One of the things the minister, and I would almost suggest laughably, states is that the hybridization has nothing to do with sentencing at all, even though in some cases it is going from a 10-year maximum down to a maximum of two years less a day.

I was wondering if the hon. member would agree with the justice minister that hybridization has nothing to do with sentencing. If that is so, then why would the government, rightly, have removed from the bill the reclassification of terrorist and genocide-related offences? Unfortunately, the government did not do so in the case of other very serious offences.

Mr. Glen Motz: Mr. Speaker, I know we are pressed for time, and I will simply say, it is all about sentencing and the reduction of sentences. That is the only impact this will have. This will shorten sentences, clear across the board, for those offences identified.

Mr. Gordie Hogg (South Surrey—White Rock, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to get up and speak to Bill C-75, an act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other acts and to make consequential amendments to other acts.

My particular interest is the Youth Criminal Justice Act. I spent 25 years working with the Criminal Justice Act in British Columbia, starting out as a youth probation officer working on the streets of Surrey, riding with RCMP officers and responding to calls, particularly on youth violence and domestic violence. I was also a foster parent for a number of youths who had been in conflict with the law. Most importantly, I was the warden of our largest youth jail in British Columbia for 10 years where I worked with youth who were on overnight arrest, remand and longer-term sentences, including a number of very serious offenders. While having that experience, I also went back to university to get a Ph.D. and was appointed an adjunct professor in criminology at Simon Fraser University. It is a position I hold today, and it has allowed me to look at these concerns and issues facing us from a conceptual framework as well as from a practical experiential model.

On the Youth Criminal Justice Act, we have been very good in Canada in being able to reduce the number of youth coming into custody. Our numbers 25 years ago were substantially higher on a per capita basis, but the development of a number of alternative measures has made our system much more responsive to the nuances and needs of young children and youth in particular.

Some good research has been in place over the past 15 to 20 years, particularly the Cracow study, which was originally funded by NATO and has been standardized in Germany as well as British Columbia. It is a longitudinal study looking at the issues that become prevalent when youth come into conflict with the law and the challenges responding to that. As a result of this longitudinal study that has been tracking youths for up to 15 years now, we are much better informed in terms of the actions we should be taking in dealing with them.

There are five profiles or pathways that have become evident in this research that inform the way we should be responding to the needs and nuances of youth. In some instances, we are able to look at and make some relatively accurate predictions with respect to the propensity of a youth to come in conflict with the law, even pre-conception.

There are environmental influences, such as the presence of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, which are overwhelming in terms of the number of youth who come into conflict with the law.

There are a number of neurological and developmental disorders which are precursors, such as ADHD/ADD and fetal alcohol syndrome, and in certain communities these conditions are epidemic. They have been particularly evident within a number of our indigenous communities.

Certainly domestic violence has a strong link as well, and there is alcohol and drug addiction. There are a number of samples in the jail that I was responsible for, but up to 90% of youths coming into custody had been using hard drugs.

There are personality disorders, aggressive disorders, dependency disorders, anti-social personalities, psychopathy. These types of disorders are also very prevalent. In fact, where we were finding youths getting into conflict with the law in their early teens, it is becoming younger and younger. We are finding now that some parents are taking their two-year-old children to children's hospitals saying they cannot control them anymore. When that happens, because of the medical model, we tend to mask it with the utilization of drugs and manage it in that fashion, but later on in life it manifests itself as they come away from the drugs in all kinds of deleterious and negative behaviours.

Also, many youth come from high needs, such as single-parent homes, high economic need, domestic violence, family and child abuse, and 60% to 70% come out of foster care.

Therefore, the proposed legislation we are talking about in terms of addressing the needs through the Youth Criminal Justice Act looks at how we can provide more community-based responses. We can look at alternative measures so that there are more choices provided to the courts and the Crown counsel when youth come before the courts. Certainly, every bit of the modern research being done tells us that we can have a far more profound impact by ensuring that we create alternatives that are responsive to the diagnosis and the needs. However, we have not reached the level we need to in order to ensure that we respond to that.

● (1340)

I think that probably a hundred years from now, people will look back and say that everything was a health issue, not a criminal justice issue. People will look at us the way we now look at the fact that in the past people were burned at the stake or stoned to death and they thought that that was a good response to things.

I think that as we become more responsive to changing our legislation, we will have more creative responses, instead of just saying that we are going to lock people up or put them in solitary confinement and those types of initiatives, which obviously are not working terribly well. I am delighted that we are providing more options within that framework, that we are giving the courts other options and that we are giving communities the chance to respond to the nuances and needs of youth as they come before the court system.

Obviously, we have to maintain safety and ensure that our communities are safe. There are some youths who are identified as being psychopathic and have behavioural issues that we cannot manage adequately without having some type of confinement. That is an important element of the approach that we take. We want to reduce incarceration for those people who are not representing risk to the well-being of our citizens.

That is an important part of the way that these modifications to the Youth Criminal Justice Act are leading us. They are leading us in a very progressive way. In many ways, Canada has been a leader in looking at different models. There was a suggestion and a movement in the 1980s toward total de-incarceration and total community-based response. Massachusetts led that.

There were a number of de-institutionalized models that happened in different pockets of Canada and they were not successful. They were not successful because they were not recognizing and identifying those youths who did constitute a risk to the community at large. Fortunately, this act allows us to hold onto that while developing the other parts of our system that have been shown to be so positive and that research is now supporting in a positive and meaningful way.

Having the public more actively engaged in alternative measures has been an important part of that type of resolution. We have seen the development of a myriad of community-based models for responding to the types of needs that these youths present. Certainly, this act provides again the opportunity for both the Crown counsel and police to screen out at different points those who are at lower risk and do not constitute a need to be put into state custody to do that.

By modernizing and streamlining our system, we are responding more adequately and appropriately to the nuances and needs of our communities at large and, importantly, to the nuances and needs of those youth who are in conflict with the law. We are finding ways to respond to the research, allowing us to provide the services that they need to become actively and positively engaged in our system and in our society.

We have seen many successes of youths who were dramatically at risk committing horrendous offences who are now very positive role models who have changed dramatically. Talking to those youths about their experiences and what they have been through, it is very revealing in terms of supporting what has happened and in terms of the research we are seeing. Their experiences are saying when they made those connections with people who are meaningful and had that relationship with them, structured it for them and held them in a place of support, that they then started to see and become connected with people in a meaningful way.

This legislation allows us a great capacity to do that. It allows us the opportunity to ensure that we provide that support while maintaining the security and safety that we need for our communities, while at the same time providing an empathetic, caring community and society that does respond to those needs.

Therefore, I am delighted to support Bill C-75 with the actions that it takes to ensure that we do have a safe, more compassionate and caring society, which I think is something that we all espouse.

● (1345)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member for South Surrey—White Rock about hybridization and how that is going to make the court system, the justice system, more efficient.

The effect of hybridization is that more offences will be prosecuted by way of summary conviction. As a result, those cases are going to be downloaded onto provincial courts that deal with summary offence matters, although 99.6% of cases are already before provincial courts.

Also, from the standpoint of Jordan, there is a 30-month timeline in superior court versus an 18-month timeline in provincial court before a delay is deemed presumptively unreasonable, upon which the case is at risk of being thrown out. In addition to downloading cases onto provincial courts that are already overstretched and overburdened, I would submit that in fact it is going to increase the risk of more cases being thrown out.

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry the I missed the beginning of the member's remarks, but I think I caught the end of them and the concern about the downloading onto provincial courts and the potential for their not meeting the timelines, and cases being thrown out of court. Certainly, this legislation would not contribute to that problem in any meaningful way.

Provincial courts have some responsibilities to appoint enough judges to respond to these needs. We looked at a number of alternative measures. As the alternative measures evident in and supported by this legislation are developed, we can take a number of cases out of the court system and ensure that those who pose the greatest risk to our society are held within the court system. We clearly need to have enough judges in place to respond to those cases.

We would reduce the impact on them by ensuring that alternative measures are developed in an active and positive way, and in a community-based fashion.

● (1350)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for South Surrey—White Rock for his important contributions to today's debate. I want to highlight his work with youth and ask him to address, first, indigenous youth in British Columbia, and second, racialized youth, particularly in the Surrey area, many of whom are of south Asian descent.

What we are proposing in the bill in creating a model for a judicial referral hearing is to take the administration of justice offences out of the criminal justice system, such as when someone breaches a curfew or a bail condition, and force the courts to look comprehensively at the circumstances of the accused, including indigenous youth and racialized youth.

How does the member for South Surrey—White Rock think that would improve certain sentences for the very youth he has been working so hard to defend and represent for the last 25 years?

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that observation. Clearly, indigenous youth are overrepresented within our system, both in our youth justice system and child welfare system. Over 50% of them are indigenous youth, and we are certainly seeing them within youth gangs in the Surrey area and the challenges there. About 40% of gang members are from South Asian families. We have been actively working with them in responding.

The issue of administrative response to that is crucial to ensure that we are intervening at the right level. We should not intervene with radical, dramatic action when we are dealing with people who are starting to show some of the precursors to negative behaviour and activities.

Having an administrative response would ensure that we are able to move those individuals out of the system and respond to them adequately and appropriately. That is one way of ensuring some reduction in the burden on the court system.

The other thing is to ensure that we do respond—

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member. We have time for just one more short question in response. Questions and comments, the hon. member for Whitby.

Mrs. Celina Caesar-Chavannes (Whitby, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have heard throughout this debate that this particular legislation looks to increase the efficiencies of our Criminal Code and to ensure that there is equity in the system.

Could my hon. colleague expand on that and tell me what his constituents would think about his voting in favour of this legislation?

Mr. Gordie Hogg: Mr. Speaker, I have had an active dialogue with a number of communities, and certainly with first nations and the south Asian community. I have met with the leaders of five gurdwaras in Surrey who are very concerned about the activity of south Asian youth and how they are overrepresented in some of the youth gang activities. They will be delighted with my support for this legislation, because it gives an appropriate intervention point for both indigenous youth and south Asian youth, who are over-represented.

The bill gives us a point where we can administratively respond to them in a positive, active fashion. This legislation provides us with a good opportunity to ensure that their lifestyle becomes much more positive. They could fit more actively into the lifestyle their communities want and are so active to support. We are giving them that option.

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to resuming debate and the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, I will let her know that there are only about five minutes remaining in the time before we get to statements by members. She will have her remaining time when we next get back to debate on the question that is before the House.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, in the heart of the beautiful upper Ottawa Valley, I appreciate this limited opportunity to contribute to this truncated debate on a piece of legislation that is important to my constituents.

I begin my comments by sharing some thoughts from a group called Because Wilno, and why it reiterates the word "because". They state:

> Because on September 22, 2015, Carol Culleton, Anastasia Kuzyk and Nathalie Warmerdam were killed in their homes near Wilno, Ontario.
>
> Because they were killed by a man they knew, who had a history of domestic violence known to police for over three decades.
>
> Because even after violence is reported, people slip through the cracks in the system.
>
> Because advocates have been calling for these cracks to be addressed, for decades.
>
> Because dealing with violence is particularly challenging in our rural communities.
>
> Because coercion and control of women is a spectrum that can begin with words and escalate towards lethal violence including multiple killings.
>
> Because the culture of society, policing and courts needs to be better.
>
> Because women continue to be killed in Canada, at a rate of 1 every 6 days.
>
> Because we couldn't just sit around doing nothing.
>
> Because we think you can help.

I thank Holly Campbell, who organized the group Because Wilno.

Violence against women is not new. While I would like to believe, coming from a predominantly rural riding like mine in eastern Ontario, that violence against women is a city problem, we know that is not the case. Violence against women continues to be a fact of life in Canada, and in a predominantly rural riding like Renfrew County, Carol Culleton, Nathalie Warmerdam and Anastasia Kuzyk were killed on September 22, 2015. Their killer was known to all of the women and to police as having a long history of violence spanning more than three decades. While the accused had previously been ordered by court to attend counselling for abusers, he never went. He had been released from prison shortly before the murders. The system failed these women. On average in Canada one woman is killed by her partner every six days. The man arrested and accused of their murders had a long criminal history, including charges involving two of the three women.

Holly Campbell, who organized the group Because Wilno, issued this statement to legislators like us:

> For too long, Canadians have looked away from violence in our homes that predominantly harms women and children in every neighbourhood, district, municipal ward and constituency of this country.

Like Holly, I am not prepared to let Carol, Nathalie, Anastasia and all the other women who have been victims of violence die in vain. The memory of their senseless deaths is too fresh not to be moved to action. I support the proposal in Bill C-75 that would increase the maximum term of imprisonment for repeat offences involving intimate partner violence and provide that abuse of an intimate partner be an aggravating factor on sentencing, as well as provide for more onerous interim release requirements for offences involving violence against an intimate partner.

The Conservative Party believes, as do I, that the safety of Canadians should be the number one priority of any government. We will always work to strengthen the Canadian criminal justice system, rather than weaken it. The Conservatives understand that a strong criminal justice system must always put the rights of victims and communities before special treatment of perpetrators of violent crimes.

My question for the government is this. Does Bill C-75, in its other 300 pages, meet the expectations of Canadians? The fact that the current government has decided to move forward with precisely the omnibus legislative format it condemned so vociferously in opposition suggests to my constituents and to all Canadians that the contents of Bill C-75 are being rushed forward as an omnibus bill precisely because these contents are out of touch with the concerns of average Canadians.

● (1355)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke will have five and a half minutes remaining in her time for her remarks, and another five minutes for questions and comments when the House next resumes debate on the question.

We will now go to statements by members.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

JOE LAFRANCESCO

Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to acknowledge the passing of Joe lafrancesco from Kelowna, British Columbia.

A steadfast volunteer, Joe was well known for his dedicated service to our community. Joe gave back through many of the clubs he belonged to and was actively involved over the years in Rotary, the Knights of Columbus, the Lions Club and was president of the Kelowna Canadian Italian Club. Joe also served as a member of Crime Stoppers, the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Kelowna Association and the Uptown Rutland Business Association.

To the end, Joe always put community before himself. Even in the final weeks, Joe and his wife Bianca made significant financial donations to both JoeAnna's House and the cancer care fund at the Kelowna General Hospital.

Big Joe added big value to our community, and my thoughts and prayers go out to his family and friends. He will be missed.

* * *

● (1400)

[*Translation*]

GOVEMBER

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year, I am wearing a bow tie instead of growing the traditional moustache to mark Movember, as men's health awareness month is known across Canada.

When Cathy, Mino, Maxime and Samuel, residents of my riding, asked me to be the honorary chair of Govember, the regional equivalent of Movember, I immediately accepted. I suggested throwing an intergenerational party to spread the message about protecting men's health throughout Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

The Thibault GM Govember dance-a-thon will be held on Saturday, November 17, from noon to midnight at the Bombardier Centre in La Pocatière. I want to thank the local dance schools that will be putting on demonstrations throughout the day.

All of the proceeds will be divided between the André Côté Foundation, the Notre-Dame-de-Fatima Hospital Foundation, and the Maison de la famille du Kamouraska in Saint-Pascal.

I hope you like to dance, Mr. Speaker, because I am inviting you and all parliamentarians to participate in my dance-a-thon.

* * *

JEWISH COMMUNITY OF STEVESTON—RICHMOND EAST

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to solemnly join the Jewish community of Richmond in condemning the horrifying anti-Semitic attack at the Tree of Life synagogue.

I feel truly privileged to represent one of our most diverse ridings, and our Jewish community is an active and integral part of it.

[*English*]

I would like to thank Rabbi Adam Rubin for allowing me to share a Shabbat dinner at Beth Tikvah.

I enjoyed having lunch with Rabbi Baitelman at the Chabad seniors luncheon, and I have had many conversations with Mike Sachs and Rabbi Levi Varnai at the Bayit.

I also want to thank Toby Rubin and everyone at the Kehila Society of Richmond for all of the great work they do. I look forward to attending their upcoming Hanukkah lunch.

* * *

GEORGE LAWRENCE PRICE

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Remembrance Day will mark 100 years since a brave young soldier, in the final moments before the armistice, lost his life, etching the name George Lawrence Price in the history books as the last Canadian and Commonwealth soldier to die in World War One.

Price was a Nova Scotian boy, a farm labourer, and after moving to Saskatchewan, he was conscripted in 1917. About a year later, on the November 10, Price's battalion took part in an attack on the Belgian city of Mons, tasked with taking the canal. However, on the morning of November 11, only minutes before the ceasefire, Price was shot in the chest by a German sniper, dying at 10:58.

On this Remembrance Day, we remember the valour, the courage and the sacrifice of soldiers like Price, who fought and gave their lives for our freedom. Please join me in honouring and remembering Nova Scotia's Private George Lawrence Price.

Today and every day, we will remember them.

* * *

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL VETERANS DAY

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in a couple of days, we will be honouring all veterans on Remembrance Day. I want to salute them. I also want to pay tribute to those we sometimes forget: the Inuit, the Métis and first nations veterans. It is estimated that between 7,000 and 12,000 indigenous people participated in the two world wars and the Korean War.

For their sacrifice, they returned home only to continue to endure exclusion and injustice, serving in different battalions and regiments, sometimes as snipers or code talkers. Although there is much work to do, I want to honour them on this 25th indigenous veterans day today, and extend our sincere *meegwetch* for their invaluable contributions to this country.

Lest we forget.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SAMEDI MIDI INTER RADIO SHOW

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Saturday, November 10, 2018, marks the 30th anniversary of the radio show *Samedi Midi Inter* on CKUT, a community radio station.

Every single Saturday for the past 30 years, this show has provided a recap of current issues in Haiti and Canada. Over time, it has become a fixture in the media landscape.

Host and founder Raymond Laurent, who has a wonderfully sonorous voice, has interviewed politicians from various levels of government and from the opposition parties.

On this milestone occasion, I want to congratulate Raymond Laurent and his team for their substantial contribution to the support and integration of Canadians of Haitian origin.

Congratulations and happy 30th anniversary.

* * *

● (1405)

[*English*]

WARTIME AVIATORS

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a hundred years ago, Canada's wartime aviators were household names. Billy Bishop, the highest scoring ace in the Royal Flying Corps, was Canadian; Raymond Collishaw, the highest scoring ace in the Royal Naval Air Service, was Canadian; so was Andrew McKeever, the highest scoring two-seater ace; so was Roy Brown, who shot down the Red Baron; so too was Alan McLeod, the pilot who became the youngest man ever to win the Victoria Cross.

Canada contributed more to the war in the air than did any other allied country. Twenty-two thousand Canadians served in the air war. Our country produced 171 officially recognized flying aces. Of the top scoring aces of all countries, on both sides, fully one-quarter were Canadian. Thousands more flew perilous artillery spotting missions, and the majority of these did not live to see the end of the war.

Ours is a glorious and tragic history. We owe it to these heroes never to let their memory lapse.

* * *

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC AMBULANCE TECHNICIAN CO-OPERATIVE

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today to recognize the work and dedication of the Coopérative des techniciens ambulanciers du Québec, or CTAQ, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary on December 15.

CTAQ is a paramedic co-operative that covers the largest territory in Quebec. It has more than 400 members who work day after day to provide top-notch paramedic services. CTAQ is recognized for its leadership and emergency medical services that exceed industry standards.

I want to take this opportunity today to congratulate all members of CTAQ for their dedication and the excellent work they do in service of Quebeckers. I thank them for their professionalism and unwavering commitment to the many lives that depend on their services.

On behalf of everyone in Louis-Hébert, I wish the Coopérative des techniciens ambulanciers du Québec all the best and many more years of success. I thank the ambulance technicians for their excellent work.

* * *

[*English*]

HOCKEY HALL OF FAME

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on that January night in 1958, as Willie O'Ree skated into history as NHL's first black player, his family, friends and fans back in Fredericton were cheering him on. On Monday, when he is finally inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame, we can bet they will all be cheering again.

Neither physical limitations nor racial taunts held Willie back from pursuing his goal. His journey is a story that continues to inspire us all.

It is to our community's credit that colour was not an issue when Willie was growing up as a kid playing on the neighbourhood rink by Charlotte Street. “The fact that I was black never came up when we played as kids” said Willie. “You could have been purple with a green stripe down the middle of your forehead, and it wouldn't have mattered. It was only later, when...I learned what 'colour barrier' meant.”

Willie O'Ree knew people would be staring at him that night at the old Montreal Forum. Nervous though he was, he chose to keep on skating. We thank Willie for that. As Willie likes to say, “ If you think you can, you can. If you think you can't, you're right.”

[*Translation*]

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, November 11, thousands of Canadians will gather at various war memorials in Canada to commemorate the ultimate sacrifice made by so many of our ancestors and our contemporaries.

Our soldiers sacrificed their lives not only during both world wars, but also more recently, in UN peacekeeping missions and in Afghanistan, where Canada served to combat terrorism. Let us not forget the 158 soldiers we lost in this recent and major war in Afghanistan. Corporal Jean-François Drouin, from my region of Beauport, bravely served his country in Afghanistan and lost his life on September 6, 2009. Since then, his courageous parents have laid a wreath in Beauport every year in memory of their son. Let us keep them in our hearts and thoughts.

Let us never forget the ultimate sacrifice that Corporal Jean-François Drouin made for our great federation. Lest we forget.

* * *

[*English*]

CANADIAN ARMED FORCES

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,

[*Member spoke in Mohawk and provided the following translation:*]

On this day, the eighth day of November, we will all bring our minds together and pay our respects to the indigenous peoples who enlisted in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Let us think of them and let us remember those who fought and died in the great wars.

Let us pay our respects and let us honour those who died for us so that we could live in peace.

Let our minds be that way.

Let us remember them.

* * *

● (1410)

[*Translation*]

ARMISTICE DAY

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on November 4, I had the honour of joining many Laval residents for the annual Armistice Day parade organized by Chomedey Royal Canadian Legion Branch 251 in my riding of Vimy.

Every year, this is an opportunity for Canadians to honour the soldiers who served Canada in the past and those who are serving today, sacrificing everything to defend our country.

We remember their bravery, recognize their courage and pay tribute to the invaluable work they do to maintain peace and security.

This year also marks the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War. I would like to thank from the bottom of my heart the soldiers who fought in that war. Thanks to them, we now know peace.

Thank you to our veterans, to our soldiers and to all those brave Canadians.

Lest we forget.

* * *

[*English*]

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Remembrance Day, Canadians will honour the service and sacrifice of our veterans and the 100th year anniversary of the end of the Great War.

Canada joined the war as a British colony and ended it as a united country.

I had the honour to be in France this August to celebrate Canada's 100 days that led to the armistice. The Canadian Expeditionary Force did what no other nation could do, defeating 47 German divisions, representing a quarter of the German forces, over those 100 days. I was proud to witness how our Canadian Armed Forces were respected worldwide for their dedication to freedom and peace.

We live in the greatest country in the world, by any measure. We have these blessings because, as it has been said in song, “all gave some, some gave all”. When our brave men and women return from their missions, we have a duty to care for the injured. Never are they asking for more than we can give.

* * *

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this Remembrance Day will mark 100 years since the end of World War One.

I rise today to celebrate a town in my riding that has a unique place in the history of the end of the First World War. North Sydney became the first community in North America to celebrate the end of the war.

On November 10, 1918, the Western Union Cable office in North Sydney received a message that the war would end the following day. The message notified that peace was to be observed on “the eleventh hour, of the eleventh day, of the eleventh month” of that year.

A parade was formed, a concert was held, bonfires were lit and celebrations continued far into the night. The town celebrated a day before the rest of North America even knew there was a truce. In all this, North Sydney has carved a distinct position as the first community to celebrate the end of the world war.

On this November 10, the 100th anniversary of the date the message arrived in North Sydney, I look forward to joining join Cape Bretoners at the North Sydney Historical Society's celebrations to mark this one-of-a-kind piece of history.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Fin Donnelly (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, each Remembrance Day, Canadians pause in a collective moment of silence to remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice in service to our country. In that moment, we remember not only their sacrifice but their commitment. We recognize our freedom, which they fought so hard to preserve, and we pay homage to their courage.

As we mark the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War and the 65th anniversary of the end of the Korean War, we pay tribute to each and every one of those who made the ultimate sacrifice and we salute those who returned, forever changed by their experience. We will always remember their selfless courage.

Lest we forget.

* * *

● (1415)

JUSTICE

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when Canadians learned that eight-year-old Tori Stafford's killer was transferred to a healing lodge just eight years into a 25-year sentence, they were rightly outraged. We heard that outrage from across the country, on talk radio and in newspaper columns. Anyone who heard this knew it was wrong for Tori's killer to be transferred.

Instead of doing the right thing from the start, the Prime Minister and his ministers became indignant in their defence of the indefensible, putting the rights of criminals over those of their victims. They accused Canadians of politicizing the issue. They accused Canadians of being fearmongers. They hid behind privacy concerns and bureaucrats instead of having the fortitude to act and make the right decision.

Tory's family spoke out. It held a protest right here on Parliament Hill. Canadians called on the government to intervene and at the end of it, Canadians were right; the Liberals were wrong.

We learned today that instead of being surrounded by trees and children, Terri-Lynne McClintic is back behind bars and razor wire where she belongs. Thank God Canadians spoke out. The Conservatives will always stand up for the rights of victims.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Halifax, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Angus "Gus" Cameron is a veteran and a devoted veterans advocate in Halifax.

Last year, Mr. Cameron came to me because he and fellow veterans were rightly disappointed that the former Conservative government had cancelled the veterans identification card. To veterans across the country, that card was a symbol of a nation's gratitude, one that they could carry with them wherever they went, giving them access to the benefits they had earned through their courageous service to Canada.

It was an honour to partner with Gus and his fellow veterans to sponsor a petition to the House, calling on our government to

reinstate the veterans ID card. I am proud to say that our government answered that call and reintroduced the veterans identification card.

I want to thank the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the Minister of National Defence for listening, acting quickly and delivering for Gus and all of our veterans.

This Remembrance Day let us never forget the tremendous debt of gratitude we owe our veterans.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning, 3,000 Canadians woke up to very bad news: Bombardier is going to cut 3,000 jobs, with 2,500 of them in Quebec. Our thoughts are with these people.

Members will recall that the Liberal government decided to lend $375 million to Bombardier two years ago. Bombardier has 30 years to repay this loan, but unfortunately it was never required to preserve jobs. Today, 3,000 workers are losing their jobs.

Can the Prime Minister tell us why, when he decided to lend taxpayers' money to Bombardier, he did not attach a guarantee—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts are with the workers, families and communities affected by this morning's announcement.

We are always concerned any time we hear about potential job losses. Our government is committed to ensuring the long-term viability and success of the Canadian aerospace sector. We will work with our aerospace industry to improve access to global markets and supply chains for one of Canada's most innovative and export-oriented industries.

* * *

MEMBER FOR SAINT-LÉONARD—SAINT-MICHEL

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those are fine words, but he should have thought of that two years ago when he loaned Bombardier $375 million of taxpayers' money.

Meanwhile the soap opera starring the member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel is an absolute farce. In the latest episode, we just learned that he is finally going to step down on January 22, that is, exactly nine months less a day before the federal election. What does that mean? No byelection. What does that mean? The people of his riding will have no representation in the House of Commons until the general election.

Why is the Prime Minister playing games with democracy?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member in question released a statement in which he mentions the files he is working on and how he will continue to serve his community until January.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister likes to toy with democracy. Some 300,000 Canadians do not have a representative in the House because the Prime Minister refuses to hold a by-election. He made a sweetheart deal to ensure that the hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel does not run in the next election.

What the Prime Minister failed to say is that the hon. member for Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel said that the Prime Minister tasked him with a special assignment.

Could the Prime Minister tell Canadians why this member had a special assignment that kept him away from the House?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member in question has publicly indicated his intention to step down from his duties in January. He has also shared the issues he will be working on until then on behalf of his community. We expect all members to work in the best interest of their constituents.

* * *

● (1420)

[*English*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Tori Stafford's killer is finally back behind bars, where she belongs.

Canadians were outraged that a child killer more than a decade away from parole eligibility was moved to a fenceless healing lodge. Each and every one of these Liberals voted against our motion that would have forced Tori's killer back behind bars, saying they did not have the power to do the right thing.

Will the Prime Minister apologize to Tori Stafford's family for forcing them to fight against him and his government to put Tori's killer back behind bars?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our hearts go out to the family of Tori Stafford for the loss they endured.

The Minister of Public Safety asked the commissioner of the Correctional Service to review the transfer decision in question and its policies on offender transfers. Following that review, he has provided direction to improve transfer policies on medium-security women offenders to facilities without a directly controlled perimeter. These changes will help ensure that guilty parties are held accountable while fostering rehabilitation so we can have fewer repeat offenders, fewer victims, and ultimately, safer communities.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has just admitted he had the power from day one to do the right thing and put Tori Stafford's killer behind bars. Instead, he hid behind bureaucrats. He hid behind the Minister of Public Safety, when all along, he had the power. He forced Tori Stafford's family to fight against the government to get justice for their murdered daughter.

Will the Prime Minister apologize to them for making them come to Ottawa to fight against the government to do the right thing?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot even say how much our hearts go out to Tori Stafford's family. We understand. We hear their anguish. That is why the Minister of Public Safety asked Corrections Canada to review their policies and to ensure that they are changed going forward. That is exactly what happened.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this morning Bombardier announced that it is cutting 2,500 jobs in Quebec, and the company's executives gave us the same old line: it is a cost-cutting measure.

However, in 2017, the company's six executives got a 50% pay raise, for a total of $42 million. They got hundreds of millions of dollars in public money, lined their pockets with it, then fired thousands of workers. That is unacceptable.

How much longer will the government keep letting those executives fatten their bank accounts instead of standing up for workers?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our thoughts are with the workers, families and communities affected by this morning's announcement. We are always concerned to learn about possible job losses.

Our government is committed to the long-term viability and success of the Canadian aerospace sector. We will work with the Canadian aerospace industry to improve access to global markets and supply chains for one of the most innovative and export-driven industries in the country.

* * *

[*English*]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister decided he will not take part in the signing of the USMCA alongside Donald Trump if tariffs are still in place. How exactly is this defending Canadian jobs? Is the Prime Minister so vain that he thinks depriving the U.S. of his presence in a photo-op is the best trade strategy to get rid of the tariffs? Make no mistake, we are still signing it. He just does not want his picture doing it. Who can blame him? I would not want my picture taken signing it either.

These tariffs are killing jobs. Will the Prime Minister finally do the right thing and not sign the agreement until the tariffs are removed?

● (1425)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I suggest the member for Essex pay attention to the region of Windsor, which is overwhelmingly happy that we have secured access to the United States for the coming years.

As I told the steel and aluminum workers on the floor of their plants, this government has their backs. Canadian countermeasures will remain in place until the unfair tariffs on steel and aluminum are removed.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I would remind the hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil and others that the time to speak is when they have the floor. Whether that comes today or some other time, they have to wait for that and keep in mind the Standing Order against interrupting.

The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, during negotiations, our purpose has always remained to create the conditions to grow a stronger middle class and improve opportunities for Canadians. We will not stop working until these unfair tariffs are gone. It is what Canadian workers and their families expect, and it is what we will do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thousands of jobs in the steel and aluminum sector are on the line because of Donald Trump's tariffs, but there is no need to panic because the Prime Minister has a strategy. He is going to go off into a corner and sulk.

He is going to refuse to have his picture taken while signing the free trade agreement and he is going to tell Mr. Trump that, if he is not nice, there will be no photo op. Mr. Trump must be quaking in his boots.

Seriously, does he think that he will be able to save the jobs of the aluminum workers who are here today by merely refusing to have his picture taken? Is that his strategy?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been negotiating with the U.S. for 13 months. With this agreement, we have secured our trade with the United States.

What is more, the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie told negotiators that he simply wanted to congratulate everyone in the room for the fantastic work they accomplished. He then added that the USMCA was the best possible agreement and that it would protect workers across the country.

We will continue to defend steel and aluminum workers and all workers across the country.

* * *

[*English*]

PRIVACY

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we learned today that the Liberals not only misled this House but misled the Privacy Commissioner to believe that the deepest personal financial information of only 500,000 Canadians would be seized, without consent, by Statistics Canada. We know now that it is 500,000 households, that almost 1.5 million Canadians' data will be captured.

Did the Liberals try to hide the true scope of this project because they knew Canadians would be, quite rightly, appalled?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the chief statistician has been absolutely transparent and clear with Canadians. When this question was posed, the chief statistician made it very clear that this information was part of a pilot project, and he was very forthcoming with his answers. Again, I want to highlight that no personal information will be disclosed. All that will be removed.

The members opposite have a fundamental problem with Statistics Canada, and the chief statistician is disappointed to see that they have not learned the lessons from 2015.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Ann Cavoukian, the former Ontario privacy commissioner, says it is time Statistics Canada realized it is no longer the same world as when the Statistics Act was first enacted. Dr. Cavoukian says,

> When our sensitive financial data is disclosed by our banks to the govt. without our consent, and then housed at "Shared Services Canada", you can bet we have something to worry about!

Why will the Liberals not listen when a privacy expert like Ann Cavoukian says, "Stop this totally unacceptable practice"?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have clear laws in place when it comes to protecting the privacy and data of Canadians. Subsection 17(1) of the Statistics Act is very clear. No policing service, RCMP, CRA, government agency, the court, or even the Prime Minister can compel Statistics Canada for any personal information. There are provisions in place to protect privacy and data. The members opposite should read the law.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals boasted about invading the privacy of more than one million Canadians by obtaining their personal financial data without their consent. It got to the point that the Privacy Commissioner launched an investigation.

This is like me going to someone's home, breaking down the door and once in the living room, asking permission to enter. That is exactly what they are doing.

In just one week, 20,000 Canadians have already signed a petition and shown that they are clearly against this invasion of their privacy.

What is the government waiting for to put a stop to this practice?

● (1430)

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not agree with my colleague because our government takes Canadians' privacy very seriously.

Let us be clear. This is a pilot project still in the design stage. No data has been collected to date. No data has been collected.

The chief statistician clearly indicated that the project will move forward only once Canadians' concerns have been addressed.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in light of the minister's comments, it might be time to pull the plug on this project. Canadians are very worried. They are worried about having the government digging around in their private financial information without their consent. This is an intrusion—an intrusion into their private lives.

When will the government, which claims to be in touch with Canadians, do right by them and permanently shut down this project?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the facts. Personal information will be removed. Canadians can rest assured that their banking information remains protected and private.

Statistics Canada can absolutely not share this information with anyone—not with any agency or government, and not with the Prime Minister. Canadians' privacy will be protected.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's plan to collect personal, private financial information from Canadians gets more disturbing every day. Yesterday we learned that despite previous statements, the number of affected Canadians every year will not be 500,000 but will easily be a million or more. They just will not say. At this rate, it will not be long before every single Canadian is tracked. Now that we know that the true scope of this project is much larger, will the Liberals finally end this surveillance scheme?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, this is over-the-top rhetoric. Using the term "surveillance scheme" is completely inappropriate and unacceptable. When it comes to Statistics Canada, the chief statistician has been very clear. He will only proceed if he gets assurances and the support of the Privacy Commissioner, whom he proactively engaged to deal with the issues around privacy and data protection.

The members opposite have been fearmongering with over-the-top rhetoric to mislead Canadians. Enough is enough. Let us support Statistics Canada, and let us support good-quality, reliable data.

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Privacy Commissioner said today at the Senate committee that he was awestruck by the revelation of the number of Canadians who will be under surveillance. It is ridiculous for the Liberals to say they are working with the Privacy Commissioner.

We also learned yesterday that despite promises to anonymize the data, Liberals will actually keep all the private information and have the ability to access it at any time. The government will be able to check every transaction and tie it to every individual.

Now that the scope has increased and the Liberals' plans to anonymize the data are gone, will the government finally put Canadians first and stop tracking their finances without their knowledge or consent?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us stick to the facts, because one falsehood after another falsehood is misleading Canadians. That is what the member opposite is doing. No personal data will be disclosed. All of that will be removed. All personal information that the members are talking about will be disclosed by the banks to their clients. No breaches of the Statistics Canada server have occurred.

Statistics Canada is proactively engaged with the Privacy Commissioner. As I mentioned, under subsection 17(1), no government, Conservative, Liberal or of any other party, can compel Statistics Canada.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PENSIONS

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals refuse to amend the bankruptcy act and workers continue to be left with nothing but crumbs.

Sears Canada employees spent their lives working and paying into their pensions. Sears shareholders got $509 million, and what did the workers get? Nothing. Once again, the most vulnerable are footing the bill.

When will the government change the law to put an end to pension theft?

● (1435)

[*English*]

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand how difficult this is for the workers at Sears and the pensioners. Our government has been very clear about supporting pensioners. We brought in the wage earner protection program. We have also strengthened the Canada pension plan.

In the last budget, we indicated the desire to use a whole-of-government approach to make sure we provide additional security measures for pensioners. With respect to the particular issue the member opposite has raised, the CCAA process has made it very clear that there are some issues. The fact that it is addressing the issues the monitor has put forward indicates that the process is working.

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about pension theft, not about CPP.

Today, we learned that the owners of Sears Canada are being sued in the hopes of recovering millions of dollars paid to investors while the company was in financial ruin. This is the same kind of corporate theft I was asking the Minister of Seniors about last week, when she accused me of providing misinformation.

The minister said consultations have and will continue to take place, yet we have not heard anything about these promised consultations. Who is misleading whom? Will the minister release a list today of all the people she has consulted, and a schedule for the formal consultations promised in the budget?

Hon. Filomena Tassi (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear that consultations have been taking place. That is a commitment we made in our 2018 budget, and it has been reaffirmed by the Prime Minister in his mandate letter to me. The consultations are taking place because this is a very difficult issue and we want an evidence-based solution. This is why these consultations are necessary.

We have the interests of pensioners at heart, and we are going to work hard to find the solution that is right for pensioners and that does not have unintended consequences for them. We are going to work hard to get the right solution.

* * *

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister refused to tell us whether the GST and HST would apply on the carbon tax. I dug up documents directly from the Canada Revenue Agency that indicate that consideration payable for the supply of the gasoline upon which the supplier will calculate the HST does include the carbon tax.

Now we know there will be a tax on a tax. Based on these calculations of 13% in the province of Ontario, how much will Ontario taxpayers spend in a tax on the tax?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by expressing my condolences to the hon. member for being left off yesterday's cover of Maclean's magazine alongside his colleagues.

With his question, the hon. member is trying to trick Canadians into believing that life will be made more expensive under our plan. That is simply not true. We are moving forward with putting a price on pollution that is actually going to make life more affordable for Canadians.

That collection of miscellaneous Conservative politicians was labelled "The resistance" on the cover of that magazine yesterday. From where I sit, all they seem to be resisting is progress on social and environmental issues.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, through you, directly to President Donald Trump, I say, "This government may have backed down to you on buy American, on softwood lumber and on so much more, but I will have you know that if you do not back down on your steel tariffs, this Prime Minister will deny you a photo op."

My question for the government is, will the Prime Minister go further and say he will not appear on the cover of a U.S. magazine until these tariffs are gone?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. I will just speak to colleagues when I can get their attention. Order. It is good to see the House in a good mood, of course.

The purpose of the rule that you cannot say "you" in here unless you are speaking to the Speaker, is of course about not talking to someone on the other side and saying, "you, you, you". Therefore, I guess this is a bit different. It is unorthodox, but I am going to allow it in this case.

● (1440)

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how I can top that, but let us listen to a Conservative who actually knows what he is talking about when it comes to trade. I quote former prime minister Brian Mulroney, who said:

> This agreement is a highly significant achievement for Canada...Canada appears to have achieved most if not all of its important objectives in this lengthy and challenging set of negotiations.

* * *

CARBON PRICING

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I report as well that the president has tweeted out a point of order that you will have to mull on after question period.

Going back to the issue of the HST, the government will collect $720 million of HST on the carbon tax, according to a basic calculation of that tax to the planned price on carbon use by Canadians.

My question is very simple. Were those numbers included in the calculation of the cost to the average family of this tax?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, the Conservative Party strategy seems to be to mislead Canadians on the cost to families.

We know that when we move forward to protect the environment by putting a price on pollution, we are actually going to leave middle-class families better off at the end of the year.

I look forward with great anticipation to the next campaign, when the Conservatives campaign on a commitment to take money from their constituents so they can make pollution free again.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is exactly his policy.

The government is proposing to take money away from all of our constituents when they commit the crime of filling up their gas tank to drive to work or heating their home in temperatures of -40°, while making pollution absolutely free to large industrial corporations that emit more than 50,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases.

At the same time, the government then claims it can take $10 in taxes for every $9 in rebates, and that somehow taxpayers will be better off. Will the government drop the phony math and tell us how much the average family will spend paying the tax on the tax?

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the last number of weeks I have watched the hon. member spin tales. He has suggested that large polluters are exempt. He has suggested that small businesses will be stuck with the bill. He has suggested that families will be worse off. These are all falsehoods.

We are moving forward with a plan that is going to make big polluters pay. We are going to give small businesses the tools they need to succeed, and we are going to make life more affordable for Canadians.

If the hon. member has the courage to ask one more question based on facts instead of falsehoods, I would be pleased to give him an honest answer. If he comes back again with these falsehoods and underlying assumptions that cannot be proven, I would be pleased to dress him down one more time.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HEALTH

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the opioid abuse problem is so severe that life expectancy in Canada could drop for the first time in decades. Even President Trump has declared the opioid epidemic to be a national crisis in the United States.

The longer the Liberals wait to take action, the worse the situation in Canada gets.

When is the Prime Minister going to implement a national strategy to address the opioid crisis?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are facing a tragic opioid crisis. We have lost thousands of Canadians over the past few years. It is a real tragedy.

Our government continues to work with the provinces and territories. In budget 2018, we proposed an investment of $230 million to, first, increase services on the ground, and second, launch a public education campaign to address the stigma.

We recognize that, in many cases, Canadians do not receive the services they need because of the stigma that exists.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for the first time in decades, life expectancy in Canada could decrease because of the ongoing opioid crisis. Canada is the second-largest user of opioids behind the U.S. Purdue Pharma was found guilty of misleading the public and downplaying the risk of addiction, and was forced to pay $830 million.

It is time for the Prime Minister to stand up to big pharma and seek justice for families. Will he launch a criminal investigation into opioid manufacturers and seek compensation for the costs of addressing the opioid crisis?

● (1445)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are in a national public health crisis when it comes to the opioid situation, and we are deeply troubled by the loss of life that we have seen.

In budget 2018, I am pleased to say that we invested over $230 million, $150 million of which is to provide emergency treatment for people on the ground. We have also made investments to put in place an anti-stigma campaign, as we recognize that many individuals do not receive the treatment they need because of the stigma that exists.

* * *

[*Translation*]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mrs. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that diversity is our strength and that Canada's linguistic duality is at the heart of our identity.

Canada's francophone and Acadian communities are facing demographic challenges and we know that immigration plays an essential role in developing their vitality, as it does in my riding, Ottawa—Vanier.

We have set an ambitious target for francophone immigration outside Quebec of 4.4% by 2023 and we are working hard to meet that target.

Could the minister give us an update?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

Our government is taking historic measures to attract francophone newcomers. Yesterday, I was pleased to announce $11 million to help francophone immigrants prepare for their new life in Canada. There will be a new service at Pearson airport to help newcomers. We will also make the French test more accessible and more affordable.

We understand the importance of francophone immigration.

* * *

[*English*]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, those who served our country deserve our utmost respect, gratitude and support. However, complaint after complaint rolls in about the Liberal government's neglect of veterans and their needs.

My constituent writes, "I am a military veteran...In mid April 2018 Veterans Affairs Canada received all my documents for a reassessment for my disability. And yet, almost 6 months later I still await a decision.... I have no way of knowing whether a decision is 2 months away or a year."

Why the wait? Why does the government continue to fail our veterans?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that we need to improve on service delays.

Since our government came to power, we have hired more than 460 front-line workers. We have also reopened 11 clinics that were shut down by the Conservatives. We have also hired a lot of mental health clinicians and have continued to work with more than 4,000 professionals.

There is still work to be done, but we will do it.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the current government gave $10 million to a convicted terrorist who built bombs in Afghanistan, but the veterans who were blown up in bomb attacks are denied the critical injury benefit. The government promised that it would stop taking veterans to court, but it is still doing it. It promised to bring back the pension for life and it broke that promise too. The consequences of these failures is a three-tiered care system for veterans. Why is the government treating our veterans this way?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our priority is the well-being and financial security of Canadian veterans. We have invested $10 billion of new money in our veterans. We are not saving money at the expense of veterans. More veterans are expected to choose the tax-free monthly payment for life over the lump sum payment. This means that the cost is spread out over a longer period of time.

Mr. Alupa Clarke (Beauport—Limoilou, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not just a matter of investments. This goes beyond the government's broken promises to veterans. We are talking about red tape and a lack of respect within Veterans Affairs Canada itself for the calls it receives from our brave men and women in uniform. I have heard stories from people who, every year anew, have to provide proof of having lost their arm in Afghanistan.

Does the government think it is right or fair to do that to our dedicated soldiers who often continue to serve here or abroad?

The Prime Minister needs to understand and commit today to reduce the department's red tape and burdensome rules.

● (1450)

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is by investing money that we can solve the problems that our veterans are having with their disability pensions and pensions for life. With the new pension for life, veterans themselves asked for a monthly payment instead of a lump sum payment. The pension for life is a complete package that provides pain and suffering compensation and income replacement benefits. There has been a significant increase in the workload. We have a lot of work to do, but we are going to keep our promises.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister claims to be a feminist, yet female veterans will receive less each month in pain and suffering payments than males because sex is a factor of life expectancy. The Veterans Affairs mandate is to compensate all members of our Canadian Forces equally. The minister is discriminating against women who have served this country. Did the Prime Minister instruct the minister to complete a gender-based analysis on the new pension scheme?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to the health and well-being of all veterans without exception. No veteran, male or female, will receive less under our new pension for life. A male veteran and a female veteran with the same level of disability who submit a claim on April 1, 2019, will receive exactly the same pain and suffering compensation. We will always be there to support women.

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CANADA POST CORPORATION

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the tactics Canada Post is using in its negotiations with employees are shameful. The corporation is attacking the most vulnerable and cutting short- and long-term disability and maternity leave benefits. Despite these attacks on workers' rights, the Liberals continue to trust Canada Post. Worse still, the Prime Minister just said that if the situation is not resolved soon, all options are on the table.

Does that mean back-to-work legislation?

What new line will the Liberals hand us to justify the fact that they are abandoning workers?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians and small businesses rely on Canada Post, especially at this time of year. We have been working with the parties, we respect and have faith in the bargaining process, and we urge parties to work together to get a good deal. If the parties are unable to achieve a negotiated deal together, very soon we will use all options to find a solution to reduce impacts to Canadians, businesses, Canada Post and its workers.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if they believe in the bargaining process, they should not be threatening back-to-work legislation. They should not be targeting sick and vulnerable workers.

We know the minister has the ability to call up Canada Post and tell it to stop. We are about to go home to our constituencies for a week. When we come back, it will have been a month that these workers have gone without pay. Will the minister pick up the phone today and do something about it or resign and make way for somebody who has the compassion and the backbone to do it?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Happily, Mr. Speaker, the NDP has never been afforded the opportunity to manage vast sectors of our economy.

We understand the effect that the work disruption is having on employees and their families. That is why our government has been encouraging both parties to reach a fair agreement as soon as possible.

Unfortunately when a strike occurs, the expiry of collective agreements affects some of the supplemental benefits available to employees through Canada Post. Rest assured, employees maintain full access to employment insurance and other important benefits, including maternity and parental benefits.

Canada Post management is accepting requests—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Oshawa.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week the Prime Minister stood his ground and told Donald Trump that he will not be attending the signing ceremony of the new NAFTA because steel and aluminum tariffs are still in place. We know how difficult it can be for the Prime Minister to miss a photo-op.

Acting like a tough guy now is too little, too late for the steel and aluminum workers who cannot make ends meet on the Prime Minister's empty gestures.

Why did the Prime Minister not show some backbone when it actually mattered?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out to the hon. member that we have added 700,000 jobs to the economy since 2015.

Vis-à-vis steel and aluminum, we are taking action and we have taken action to prevent the diversion and dumping of unfairly priced foreign steel. We have added $2 billion to help workers in the factories affected. We have consulted widely on possible trade remedies and measures. We have heard from interested stakeholders and shareholders and we are considering options as we move ahead.

USMCA is a good deal for Canada and we are proud that we achieved it.

● (1455)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, they are proud of that deal, but the Prime Minister will not attend the signing ceremony and will not have his picture taken with Mr. Trump. The reality is that the Liberals' secret weapon for protecting Canadian steel and aluminum workers is the Prime Minister declining to take part in a photo op.

Why is the Prime Minister so afraid of standing next to Donald Trump in a photo?

Why will he not stand up to Donald Trump and defend our steel and aluminum workers?

Hon. Andrew Leslie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I first want to make sure that everyone understands that we have created more than 700,000 good jobs since 2015.

We are working very hard and quite successfully to protect Canada's steel and aluminum industries—

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Battle River—Crowfoot seems to forget that the time to speak is when he has the floor. He seems to think he does not need to have the floor in order to speak, and of course the danger of that is that he might not have it for quite a while. All right?

The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Andrew Leslie: Mr. Speaker, we have added $2 billion to defend and protect the interests of Canadian workers. We are also providing targeted tax relief to Canadian manufacturers dealing with exceptional circumstances.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that there is a labour shortage and that we must act quickly. I have made several attempts to advance the file of a group of business people who are ready to take action and make investments to resolve the labour shortage problem. The matter has stalled at the Department of Employment and Social Development.

We must support our regions and our business people so they can remain competitive. I am urging the Prime Minister to instruct the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour to authorize the pilot project.

When are the Liberals going to do something about this?

[*English*]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is right. We have one of the fastest growing economies in the G7, the lowest rate of unemployment since the seventies, and this brings new challenges.

Certain regions across the country are struggling with finding good, talented people. As I said before, we are working extremely hard to make sure that every Canadian has the skills needed to take advantage of these job opportunities.

I continue to hear from employers across the country, however, including Quebec, that a robust immigration system is key to solving some of these problems.

We are going to continue to invest in skills and training programs and ensure that every Canadian—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville.

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PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, constituents in my riding have identified gun and gang violence as a significant public safety issue that must be urgently addressed. Last November, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness announced funding that would help support a variety of initiatives to reduce gun crime and criminal gang activities.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction kindly update this House on our government's efforts to reduce gun and organized crime across the country?

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Youth) and to the Minister of Border Security and Organized Crime Reduction, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Mississauga—Streetsville for his tireless advocacy on this issue. The safety and security of Canadians are top priorities for our government, and today we announced an investment of $86 million to help stem the flow of illegal firearms into Canada and provide necessary equipment and technology to both the CBSA and the RCMP.

We are listening to the concerns of Canadians, while the Conservatives want to weaken firearms laws without consultation. Canadians can continue to have tremendous confidence in the work carried out by these agencies, and we will continue to work with them to bolster prevention and enforcement programming.

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[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Privy Council Office has revealed that 73 people were aware of Liberal cabinet secrets about the decision to delay the shipbuilding contract awarded to Davie.

We know that several Liberal ministers and MPs had the appearance of or a real conflict of interest in this matter.

Once again, the Prime Minister has decided to withhold the information.

Who are the 73 people who were also in the know? At the very least, we want to know which Liberal members were among them.

● (1500)

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the department of public prosecutions is in charge of the prosecution in this case. The defence has obviously a very eminent defence counsel. I have not seen any indication anywhere where the hon. gentleman opposite has been engaged to represent the parties in a legal dispute before the courts. The courts are seized of this matter. The representations will be made in court. An independent judge will make the decision.

* * *

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of problems with employment insurance: the spring gap, 15 weeks of disability benefits, and the list goes on. Add to that the fact that the EI eligibility criteria are sexist.

We know a lot of women are in precarious jobs, which means they do not qualify for employment insurance. Only one-third of unemployed women are eligible compared to half of unemployed men. How can that be right?

This government calls itself feminist. When will it open its eyes and reform this outdated, discriminatory, sexist employment insurance system?

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to assure members that EI reform is an ongoing process with this government. We have made EI more accessible and working while on benefit more easy. We have also sped up the way in which claims are processed, and therefore the dollars are arriving at family's homes much quicker. EI reform is fundamental to making sure that workers get the support they need as they transition in a very volatile economy. The best news is the 700,000 jobs we have created, which makes EI less and less important. On the issue that she raised, that is an important issue, and we are seized of it. We will be reporting back to the House with developments as soon as we can.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, farmers across southern Ontario are facing high levels of vomitoxin in this year's corn crop, making it unusable as livestock feed or for ethanol. This means contracts risk being unfilled, increased costs and delays for testing, and significant cost flow issues caused by lack of storage for crops and lack of alternative markets for this corn.

Why has the Minister of Agriculture failed to address the concerns of Canadian farmers?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude Poissant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have programs to meet the needs of farmers in the west and across Canada. We will work with our provincial counterparts to solve the problem.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday evening, the House voted against the principle that Quebec should choose its own integration model.

The three non-negotiable principles underpinning the Quebec nation are gender equality, separation of church and state, and French as the common tongue. None of those principles appear in the multiculturalism policy.

Why is the government not letting Quebec make its own choices about how its people want to live together in society?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, immigration has always played an important role in the Canadian economy and contributed to Canada's success.

[*English*]

We believe that a fair and simple immigration system is key to attracting the best and the brightest talent from around the world, which is followed by investment.

We will not opine, of course, on specific proposals in the context of an election, but at the same time, we will continue to work with the Province of Quebec to build on the great record of collaboration we have had with the Government of Quebec. In fact, I met just this week with my new counterpart from Quebec and we had a great meeting. We committed to work to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Montcalm.

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[*Translation*]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Mr. Luc Thériault (Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the House of Commons claims to recognize the Quebec nation, but when push comes to shove, Ottawa says no: no to advancing French in Quebec, no to our environmental sovereignty, and no to allowing us to decide how we want to live together in society.

Will the Prime Minister admit that the recognition of Quebec as a nation means nothing at all to his party? It is nothing but a sham.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is once again trying to sow division and rehash old squabbles. I find that surprising because I thought that party recognized the importance of unity considering that its members got back together.

Quebeckers are proud Canadians who share common values with the rest of the country. We will take no lessons from the Bloc Québécois. We will work together for all Quebeckers and all Canadians.

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Irving seems to be suffering from an obsessive jealousy problem. As soon as Ottawa starts eyeing up another shipyard, Irving throws a hissy fit. By way of apology, the government offers Irving gifts. It just awarded Irving another $800-million contract for a useless slush breaker, just so that Irving would not have any gaps in its order book.

Meanwhile, there are only 60 workers left at Davie, and the federal government has nothing but peanuts to offer them between now and 2021.

When will Davie get the contract for the *Obelix*?

● (1505)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada has always provided opportunities for the Davie shipyard in its shipbuilding strategy. Of course we value the expertise of Davie workers. This summer I personally went to Davie to announce a $610-milllion contract for the purchase of three icebreakers and the conversion of a first vessel. On November 1 of this year, we announced our plans to award $7 billion in maintenance contracts for 12 Halifax-class frigates to three shipyards, including Davie.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is still just 2% of the naval strategy, or peanuts.

We know that the Conservatives and the Liberals are one and the same. They are Irving's minions and lackeys. Only Irving is paid to protect its forests against the spruce budworm. Irving is pushing to revive energy east, to profit while polluting. Irving has been awarded so many federal contracts that it is falling behind.

When will the government stop feeding these corporate leeches and finally give Davie some real contracts?

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the best illustration of how the Conservatives and the Liberals are not one and the same is that Davie had no contracts with the Conservatives and large contracts with the Liberals.

Ms. Monique Pauzé: Mr. Speaker, given the significant increase in rail accidents in Canada, you will surely find unanimous consent for the following motion: that this House calls for the Transportation Safety Board to reverse its decision and keep the rail transportation of flammable liquids, like the crude oil that caused the Lac-Mégantic disaster, on its watch list as requested by the Fédération québécoise des municipalités.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Pierre Nantel: Mr. Speaker, I would like to know whether my colleague from Canadian Heritage is concerned about the fact that La Presse cut 37 jobs, that Le Droit will likely close up shop if nothing changes, that Postmedia is on the verge of bankruptcy and that Capital Media is in one hell of a mess—

The Speaker: Order. I believe that is debate.

The hon. member for Haldimand—Norfolk is rising to ask the usual Thursday question.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could the government tell us what business is planned for the week following our constituency week?

[*English*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure our colleagues were looking forward to the chance when I could answer the Thursday question again. It is good news as I am about to do so.

[*Translation*]

This afternoon, we will continue with the report stage debate on Bill C-75 on the modernization of the criminal justice system.

Tomorrow, pursuant to an order made on September 21, the House will be adjourned to allow members to return to their ridings for Remembrance Day.

As my colleague indicated, next week will be dedicated to working on behalf of our constituents.

[*English*]

On Monday, November 19, we shall have an allotted day.

On Tuesday, we will resume debate at report stage of Bill C-75, the justice modernization bill.

Finally, I know all Canadians are looking forward to Wednesday, because the Minister of Finance will deliver his fall economic statement.

While I am on my feet, Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it I think you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

> That, notwithstanding any standing order or usual practice of the House, at 4 p.m. on Wednesday, November 21, 2018, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings to revert back to "Statements by Ministers" to permit the Minister of Finance to make a statement; after the statement, a member from each recognized opposition party, a member of the Bloc Québécois, and the member for Saanich-Gulf Islands may reply; after each member has replied, or when no member rises to speak, whichever comes first, the House shall proceed to the taking of any recorded divisions deferred to the end of government orders or to immediately before the time provided for private members' business and then proceed to the consideration of private members' business.

I think that was quite clear. If necessary, I can repeat the whole thing again.

Speaker's Ruling

● (1510)

The Speaker: That is very kind of the hon. Minister of Intergovernmental and Northern Affairs and Internal Trade to offer that. I think probably members would prefer to pass on that.

Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: Before I rule on a point of order, I wonder if members would permit me to say how nice it is to have teachers from across the country visiting us this week from the Teachers Institute.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

PETITIONS—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised on October 29, 2018, by the hon. member for Haldimand—Norfolk concerning the right of all Canadians to petition Parliament. I would like to thank the member for having raised the matter.

[*Translation*]

During her intervention, the member for Haldimand—Norfolk explained that a paper petition that she received from constituents was not certified, a requirement before presenting it in the House. The objection was that the paper was not the “usual size”.

The current practice is that the petition should be legal or letter-size. She noted that the petition was on ledger-sized paper specifically to accommodate the signatories, each of whom has some degree of visual impairment, and that the petition itself seeks to amend the rule of the House, Standing Order 36(1.1)(c), dealing with this requirement for paper of usual size. This rule, she finds, denies to some fair and reasonable access to the paper petitions’ process.

[*English*]

As the member mentioned, she raised this subject a year ago, on October 24, 2017. At the time, I suggested that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs consider this particular matter. The committee did just that on May 8 of this year, but no recommendation was brought forward to remedy the problem. However, the Chair is pleased to note that the committee did see fit to present its 75th report earlier today. In particular, it contains a recommended change to Standing Order 36(1.1)(c) that addresses the issue raised by the member for Haldimand—Norfolk.

I thank the hon. member and the committee for their efforts to better ensure the right of all Canadians to participate in the democratic process to the greatest extent possible.

[*Translation*]

I thank all honourable members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-75, An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke has five and a half minutes remaining in her speech.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, reducing penalties for serious crimes sends the wrong message to victims, law-abiding Canadians and criminals. The government is failing to take criminal justice issues seriously. Sadly, for Canadian women, the Prime Minister has developed a reputation for obfuscation when clarity is required. The Prime Minister sets a bad example.

The female reporter who was subjected to an unwanted sexual advance by the Prime Minister in her workplace is still waiting for an admission of responsibility. His hypocrisy in lecturing others while failing to account for his own behaviour sets a bad example at a time when members of his own party are lecturing Canadians that bad behaviour is encouraged by the things politicians say or do not say.

The following open letter appeared in a Toronto newspaper this week. I cite it because it is important that the government hear directly from the casualties of its neglect of the rights of victims and their families. It states:

> When I was 10 years old, one of Canada's most notorious pedophiles — Peter Whitmore — kidnapped, tortured and raped me in an abandoned house in rural Saskatchewan after repeatedly slipping in and out of the justice system's oversight.
>
> And so you might imagine the rush of anger, pain and sadness I felt reading the recent news that Terri-Lynne McClintic — who kidnapped, raped and killed eight-year-old Tori Stafford in 2009 — was moved from a maximum-security prison to an Indigenous healing lodge.
>
> I feel the pain of the Stafford family. The justice system is once again failing to protect our children.
>
> It was the Liberal government that released Peter Whitmore from his eighth time in a federal prison for the abduction and rape of a myriad of different children before his sights fell upon me in 2006.
>
> When I tell my story publicly, I usually ask the audience: "What is the most important thing to us and to the future of our country?" The answer is plain and simple. Our children. How could someone as callous and destructive as McClintic be moved to a healing lodge? How can people who are supposed to ensure justice is done allow this to happen?
>
> This is not the first time the Liberal government or parole boards have failed to keep child abusers locked up. Over the past few months, I have come upon multiple cases of convicted pedophiles and child murderers being released or having their sentences reduced.
>
> For example, Ryan Chamberlin, a Saskatchewan hockey coach who admitted to sexually abusing four young boys after a prior history of sexually abusing children, was released after serving less than four years in prison.
>
> His mother told the media: "It is so sickening to even think he's going to be back out and I can't do anything more about it," adding that men like her son can't change and the federal government must act to keep them behind bars.
>
> Cyle Larsen, a pedophile who has multiple convictions and has not sought treatment, was released recently after serving 12 months in a Calgary correctional facility. The Edmonton Police Service went so far as to issue a public statement saying they fear Larsen, who plans to live in Edmonton, "will commit another sexual offence against someone under the age of 16 while in the community."
>
> The striking statement, according to the force, was issued as part of its "duty to warn the public about the risk Larsen poses."
>
> "Larsen is considered an untreated child sex offender with pedophilic interests towards both male and female children," police said. "Larsen has a history of opportunistic offending against children known to him, however, (he) is also believed to be at risk of offending against victims unknown to him and has shown he will groom and/or lure his victims if given the chance."
>
> McClintic, a convicted child murderer, who is anything but a model prisoner, is being moved to a healing lodge intended to rehabilitate prisoners with light sentences. Translation: her punishment for murdering and assaulting a child will now amount to living with minimal security in a facility that receives child visitors.
>
> What kind of person does not understand that these "people" do not change? Predators are predators. A 25-year study of sex offenders in Canada found about 3-in-5 offenders reoffended (based on sex re-offence charges or convictions or court appearances data). That figure increased to more than 4-in-5 when all offences and undetected sex crimes were included in the analysis.
>
> These loopholes are making our justice system look like a game of catch and release with no more than a slap on the wrist for a consequence. The real punishment is handed off to victims and their families.
>
> What makes this such a painful blow for victims and families impacted by these monsters is the failure of the [Liberal] government to stand up for the rights of the victims and survivors.
>
> Some people are offended when victims speak out seeking justice. They appear to defend the rights of predators who destroyed lives. Predators like mine, who raped and abducted many children in his pedophilic career, were allowed to walk free from a federal prison on his way to the front door of my parent's Saskatchewan farmhouse in 2006.
>
> Eight times the system failed to stop a monster from getting back on the streets. Eight times a family was ripped apart never to be whole again. Eight times he slipped through the cracks and on the ninth time he chose the wrong child and the wrong family; a family who is not giving up until justice is truly served.

● (1515)

> I am raising my voice for those who cannot to let the Stafford family, victims and victims' families know that they are not alone while standing against the failing justice system. I am standing up for the protection of our children. I am speaking out for what is right.

The author of this letter is a farmer and a volunteer firefighter.

Bill C-75 needs to be chopped up to allow for careful consideration and proper debate. Anything less would be to fail Canadians.

● (1520)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. member if there may be some common ground in the important aspects of domestic violence she indicated in the first and second parts of her speech, which are a priority for her side of the House.

What I would put to her is that this legislation proposes important changes in respect to domestic violence and intimate partner violence, by expanding the definition so that it does not just cover violence by a spouse but also by a dating partner or a former spouse; increasing the maximum sentence for those convicted of intimate partner violence; and, indeed reversing the onus on bail for those repeat offenders.

In fact, the changes we are making to preliminary inquiries would eliminate the likelihood that a woman in a sexual assault trial is victimized twice. By removing the preliminary inquiry, we will no longer have sexual assault victims testifying twice, in both the prelim and the trial process.

Is the member encouraged to see those kinds of changes when she puts the rights of victims of sexual assault and intimate partner violence at the heart of the legislation?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned in my speech that adding jail time as a consequence and interpreting previous activities of that nature as assault is one action I support in Bill C-75.

However, Bill C-75 is an omnibus bill. That is the very type of legislation the Liberal government promised during the election it would not bring forward.

Speaking of dating, what the Liberals changed from an indictable offence to a summary offence is the application of noxious substances to other people. That says that putting a date rape drug into a person's drink is really not that serious. I oppose that.

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her contribution and for standing up for victims, as we all like to do.

The member mentioned that the use of a noxious substance was changed from an indictable offence to a summary offence. Of course, that is not correct. It was changed to an offence that, based on a prosecutor's discretion, could be proceeded with either as an indictable offence or through a summary conviction, as were many of the offences in the bill.

Does my hon. colleague support the changes the committee made to the bill to remove the bawdy house and vagrancy provisions in the Criminal code that have been applied against gay men?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, in my speech, I did not touch on that. I am not sure what happened in committee, but I will talk about a part that I am familiar with, the reduction of sentences from an indictable offence to a hybrid offence with respect to impaired driving.

In my riding, anyone who has driven through the roads will see large billboard signs of Emily. Emily was a girl, about the age of one of my daughters. In fact, she looked very much like one of them. She had just backed out of her parents' driveway and a person, drunk out of her mind, bashed into her, and the girl's car exploded in fire. We happened to be driving along the main street, a couple of blocks away from that. The parents and the neighbours who watched Emily burn alive could hear her screams.

Making drunk driving less of an offence is a tragedy. It is certainly an insult to the memory of that very innocent Emily.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are aspects of the legislation that I would think the member across the way would definitely endorse.

Preliminary hearings, for example, will now be used far less often. A good example of that would be that female victims of physical assault would not have to relive that nightmare by going to a preliminary hearing. This legislation addresses that issue. Would the member not agree this is a positive aspect of the legislation?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the point behind this proposed legislation was supposed to be the issue arising out of the Jordan decision, that justice delayed is justice denied. What the Liberals are trying to do is to shorten the length of time that a person has to wait before going to trial. However, when we eliminate these preliminary hearings, that only amounts to about 3% of total court time.

What the Liberals are doing in many parts of the bill will increase the length of time. Also, by hybridizing some of the indictable offences, it means that, if they even go to jail at all, they will be coming back.

There are many parts of the bill that I do not agree with.

● (1525)

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be on the Standing Committee for Justice and Human Rights, and I know that our committee did good work in reviewing this proposed legislation.

I am pleased to speak today in support of Bill C-75 and will spend my time today outlining proposed changes to the Youth Criminal Justice Act, YCJA, in particular. These changes would focus on administration of justice offences and how they are dealt with in the youth criminal justice system.

As members may know, the YCJA came into force in 2003 and has significantly reduced the overall use of the formal court system and custody of youth. However, despite the overall success of the YCJA in achieving its goals, the treatment of young persons in administration of justice offences has remained an area of concern.

While the YCJA clearly encourages alternatives to charging for less serious offences, approximately 85% of youth accused of administration of justice offences are subject to formal charges, with many of these cases leading to custody. This is despite provisions in the YCJA that require consideration of all reasonable alternatives to custody in the circumstances. These high rates of charging and custody for administration of justice offences contribute to delays in the system and the overrepresentation of vulnerable youth, particularly indigenous youth, in that system for conduct that would not in and of itself be criminal.

The aim of the proposed youth reforms in Bill C-75 is to strengthen aspects of the currently used justice framework so that fewer young persons are prosecuted and incarcerated for administration of justice offences. In this regard, the bill would amend the YCJA to do several things. First, it would further encourage the use of alternatives to charges, such as extrajudicial measures and judicial reviews, in response to administration of justice offences. Second, it would ensure that the conditions imposed on youth at the bail stage or at sentencing are necessary to address the offending behaviour of the youth concerned, and which are required for criminal justice purposes. Third, it would further restrict the use of custodial sentences for administration of justice offences.

Bill C-75 would provide that extrajudicial measures, in other words, informal measures, such as police warnings or referrals to community-based programs, are adequate to hold a young person accountable for breaches of conditions or failure to appear at the bail stage and for breaches of community-based youth offences. An exception to this presumption, however, would arise in circumstances where the young person either has a history of breaches or where the breach caused harm or a risk of harm to the safety of the public.

[*Translation*]

In some cases, extrajudicial measures may not considered an adequate response to the breach. For such cases, the bill establishes the circumstances in which a judicial referral hearing, as set out in Bill C-75's proposed Criminal Code amendments, or the existing provision for reviewing community service set out in the YCJA would be used.

These alternatives would be the preferred approach when appropriate, and the use of formal charges for administration of justice offences would be discouraged, except as a last resort.

I would now like to talk about the use of conditions as part of the youth criminal justice system.

Many people believe that the problems with administration of justice offences are rooted in the myriad of conditions imposed on youth. The concern is that, in many cases, the conditions set the youth up for failure, leading to new charges and perpetuating the youth's involvement in crime.

● (1530)

[*English*]

Dr. Jane Sprott, a professor at Ryerson University, who has focused her research over the past decade on the YCJA and issues surrounding bail and the use of bail relief conditions, in her testimony before our committee, stated:

> there are numerous broad-ranging conditions placed on youths, and many times those conditions appear to be crafted with broad social welfare aims that go far beyond the purpose of release conditions....
>
> The use of these broad welfare or treatment-based conditions is problematic for a variety of reasons...so however well intended...they're unlikely to achieve their desired goals and can actually do more harm in a variety of ways, one of which is setting the youth up for failing to comply.

The youth justice proposals in Bill C-75 would require greater scrutiny at the front end to ensure that any conditions imposed were reasonable in the circumstances and necessary for a valid criminal law purpose, such as ensuring the young person's attendance in court or protecting the safety of the public.

Furthermore, conditions could not be imposed on a young person unless he or she would reasonably be able to comply with those said conditions. Finally, the bill would prohibit the imposition of conditions or the detention of young persons as a substitute for appropriate child protection, mental health or other social measures.

As I mentioned, the use of custody in relation to administration of justice offences committed by young persons remains an area of concern due to the fact that 35% of these cases are resulting in custody. Bill C-75 would modify the criteria for youth custody by providing that custody could not be imposed on the basis of prior failure to comply with non-custodial sentences, unless the prior failures resulted in actual findings of guilt. In other words, evidence alone of prior failures would not be sufficient.

In addition, the bill would provide that if a youth justice court was imposing a sentence for a breach at the bail stage or for a failure to comply with a community-based sentence, custody could not be imposed unless the young person caused harm, or a risk of harm, to the safety of the public in committing the offence currently before the court. These changes would make it less likely for administration of justice offences to lead to custody for youth.

In closing, it is a pleasure to be a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, and I can assure my hon. colleagues that we did a comprehensive study of Bill C-75. While I know that there were legitimate disagreements between members of the committee, there were also a number of amendments made that were unanimously adopted that strengthened the bill.

I thank the many witnesses who gave their time and expertise to assist the committee through testimony and written submissions.

I am confident that these reforms I have touched on today would contribute to a more efficient youth criminal justice system and a better justice system overall. They would free up court time so the more serious criminal matters, both on the youth side and the adult side, could be dealt with in a timely fashion and in line with the parameters set out in the Jordan decision. That is why I support passage of the bill and urge all my hon. colleagues to do so as well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a question for my colleague.

If the government wants to reduce delays in the criminal justice system, why did it not use this bill to eliminate the mandatory minimum penalty regime imposed by the Harper government a few years ago?

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Fraser: Madam Speaker, this is an important question. I appreciate my friend raising it. Obviously, mandatory minimum penalties is an issue that has to be dealt with. Some mandatory minimum penalties are appropriate. There are others the Supreme Court of Canada has ruled are inappropriate and violate the charter.

It is important that the government take a comprehensive view to ensure that we get this right. That review is ongoing right now. We will make sure that we take the time to get it right and set the criminal justice system up for doing its duty every day to mete out justice in the best and appropriate way.

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, I heard the member opposite respond to a question on some of the weaknesses of the bill, and since he is on that path, I would like to ask him if he could outline some of the areas that could perhaps be strengthened or be better with this bill. Could he highlight those weaknesses he wished would have been in the bill to make it better than the way the bill is as we see it?

● (1535)

Mr. Colin Fraser: Madam Speaker, this bill does a number of things that will address the issue of delays in our courts. Does it fix every problem our criminal justice system has? No. Is it a positive step in the right direction? It one hundred per cent is. Therefore, I support the bill.

With respect to the administration of justice offences, the bill will get rid of the tremendous backlog in our provincial courts. With respect to the custodial sentences being applied to our youth, especially indigenous youth, as I highlighted in my speech, it will really get at the heart of many of the issues that are causing the delays. Of course, one bill does not fix all problems.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I first want to compliment the member, not just on his comments here today but on his tremendous work at the justice committee in terms of bringing his expertise to bear in the study that was undertaken.

The member commented on the importance of looking at reforms, and he highlighted some of the committee testimony, specifically around bail. We know that indigenous and other marginalized groups are overrepresented in the criminal justice system and are disproportionately impacted by the bail process. We know that they are disproportionately impacted because they are sometimes detained in custody for reasons that are entirely unrelated to the offence they are alleged to have committed, such as not having enough money or not knowing individuals who are suitable to supervise them if they are released on bail.

We are changing bail through certain key amendments in this legislation to take into account the overrepresentation of indigenous and other marginalized groups. I am wondering if the member could comment on how those changes will alleviate the plight of those groups in particular.

Mr. Colin Fraser: Madam Speaker, through the testimony we heard at committee, it is obvious that the measures in this bill will go a long way toward dealing not only with the delays in our court system but with the unfairness as well. There is a patent unfairness that we see far too often when marginalized individuals come before the criminal justice system, and for one reason or another, are given conditions they cannot reasonably comply with and that are therefore breached. They do not comply with conditions they really had no ability to comply with.

It is important that the judicial referral hearings that are one aspect of this bill are put in place to not only deal with the backlog in our court system but to ensure fairness for all individuals who are facing a criminal charge.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise in the House especially to talk about ensuring the safety of my constituents and all Canadians.

Every day since the 2006 election I have had the privilege of being chosen to represent the values that are dear to us in Lévis—Lotbinière. My Conservative colleagues and I are determined to live up to that honour ethically and with respect and integrity.

Generally speaking, the legislation debated and passed in the House moves Canada forward, but since the election of this Liberal majority government, legislation is debated and passed very quickly in the House, which is moving our country backward. The list is long, but consider the marijuana legalization legislation, which is disastrous for the future of our young people, not to mention the bill before us today.

I would like nothing more than to remain positive, even optimistic, or even bury my head in the sand like so many other MPs are doing when it comes to Bill C-75, the 300-page omnibus justice bill.

As the official opposition, we have to once again call out this Liberal government's poor judgment, as it refuses to consider the impact that some of its changes will have on the safety of our children and our country. What is motivating the government? Is it trying to keep one of its promises at all costs, even if that means setting Canada back? Time will tell.

We were fortunate to have inherited one of the most stable and robust political systems in the world, a model in terms of peace, order and good governance. Of course, things took a turn for the worse with this Liberal government, which wants to liberalize everything that we think should have some oversight.

Making major changes to Canada's justice system should be a judicious exercise, one that is not taken lightly, as the Liberal government seems to have done once again. Believe it or not, rather than taking action to combat terrorism, the Liberals want to get rid of penalties imposed on those who go abroad to join a terrorist group like ISIS.

What should we make of this Prime Minister who believes that reintegration, rather than prosecution, is the best way to treat ISIS fighters? Clearly, in keeping with the usual Liberal opportunism, the rights of victims and the safety of Canadians are not among the Liberal government's priorities to the same degree as they were top priorities for the Conservatives. The Prime Minister wants to lower penalties for serious crimes.

Apparently reason, committee testimony, studies, and plain old common sense just do not matter. If this bill passes, criminals may have to do nothing more than pay a fine instead of serving jail time for serious crimes such as leaving Canada to participate in a terrorist group, trafficking in persons and impaired driving causing bodily harm.

It makes absolutely no sense. All of these crimes are indictable offences and carry with them the maximum jail time they deserve. The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights heard from victims of crime who are angry that the Liberals are again failing them by denying justice for their loved ones.

Recently, the Prime Minister refused to put a murderer back in jail. He decided to pay veterans' benefits to incarcerated criminals who never served their country. That is scandalous.

Canada's Conservatives have always stood up for the rights of victims of crime, and we will not stop now. That is why we submitted over 100 amendments to ensure the continued safety of Canadians and our country.

We called for serious crimes to remain indictable offences and demanded that the Liberals reverse the elimination of preliminary inquiries and peremptory challenges of jurors.

We also called for a reversal on the elimination of cross-examination of police officers for certain offences and an increase to the maximum sentence for sexual assault.

● (1540)

We demanded that the victim surcharge imposed by the courts not be reduced.

Obviously, some of the amendments are commendable. The Conservatives can support some of the proposals set out in Bill C-75. We agree to remove the provisions of the Criminal Code that have been deemed to be unconstitutional. The Conservatives can support that measure because it will benefit victims of crime and it will clean up the Criminal Code.

It goes without saying that we support increasing the maximum sentence where offenders have been repeatedly violent toward an intimate partner as well as the consideration of intimate partner violence as an aggravating factor in sentencing. We also support more stringent temporary release requirements in the case of offenders who have committed intimate partner violence.

It also goes without saying that we support the provisions to reduce delays in our justice system, particularly those that seek to limit the scope of the preliminary inquiry, allow increased use of technology to facilitate remote attendance by any person in a proceeding, modernize and clarify interim release provisions to simplify the forms of release that may be imposed on an accused, and provide for a judicial referral hearing to deal with administration of justice offences involving a failure to comply with conditions of release or failure to appear as required.

Finally, modernizing the language used in the Criminal Code to make it non-discriminatory is also a very good thing.

The Prime Minister played the part of the grasshopper who travelled here, there and everywhere around the world singing and dancing. Time has become a critical factor for this Prime Minister, who claims that his government is introducing an omnibus bill so that it can fulfill multiple election promises at once, since this is the final sprint before the next election in a few months.

This is deplorable and a fait accompli. Introducing a big bill such as this one leaves the opposition little time for careful and in-depth study. For most of the session, Bill C-45 on marijuana legalization and Bill C-46 on drug-impaired driving kept the Senate busy.

They are two major pieces of legislation that make good on the Liberals' immoral promise to legalize marijuana, a promise made during the 2015 election campaign.

These delays and poor management of the legislative agenda have left the government short on time to fulfill its mandate. It will be hard pressed to achieve its goals with Bill C-75 and other pieces of legislation that have been languishing for months.

We criticized the government for failing to do anything up to this point to reduce delays in our legal system and we were critical in particular about its approach to judicial appointments.

Can members believe that as of April 1, 2018, or three years after he was elected as Prime Minister, there were 59 vacant judicial positions at the federal level? We believe that it takes less time and is more effective to appoint judges than to impose an omnibus bill on Parliament.

In closing, under no circumstances should checking off an item on their list of election promises compromise the safety of honest Canadians and our borders or weaken Canada's justice system.

It is not just the Prime Minister who will be adversely impacted, but an entire generation that we have been honourably defending for more than 150 years.

● (1545)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech and comments by my colleague opposite. I would like to raise the point of LGBTQ rights, a point that neither he nor his Conservative colleagues addressed, but which was raised a number of times in committee.

[*English*]

There are two aspects of this bill I want to solicit the member's comments on. First, this bill would put aspects that relate to the LGBTQ2 community into compliance with the Constitution. It would remove vagrancy and the bawdy house provisions, which would allow the expungement of records that historically discriminated against the LGBTQ2 community. Second, the bill would remove section 159 of the Criminal Code, which makes sexual relations for consenting LGBTQ2 minors between the ages of 16 and 18 an offence, whereas the same sexual relations between a heterosexual couple are not an offence.

Does the member opposite appreciate these aspects in terms of this government and Parliament's support on the important issue of human rights of the LGBTQ2 community?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Madam Speaker, all Canadians are entitled to the same legal system.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Madam Speaker, a number of amendments were rejected in committee. Which of these rejected amendments was he most disappointed by?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

I was disappointed by all of the rejected amendments, but I was most disappointed by the Liberal ideology of making life easier for criminals. They are forgetting the victims and families of victims, who are affected for the rest of their lives. It is always easier for a Liberal to be there for people getting out of prison. They want to support them, and that is fine, but they need to make sure that these offenders are not getting out early. They need to be thinking about everything. When a criminal is released prematurely, that can affect 25, 30 or 40 Canadians. This is what I find most disappointing.

● (1550)

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciated my colleague's speech.

I hope that my colleague realizes that Bill C-75, as reported back to the House, makes no changes to the terrorism laws. The member spoke at length about them, but the committee amended the bill so that no changes were made to the terrorism laws.

The member said that he was disappointed that the Conservative amendments concerning hybrid offences were not accepted. For example, their amendment that cattle branding not be a hybrid offence was rejected. Is he disappointed about that? Does he believe that it is too serious an offence to warrant a sentence of two years less a day? What about dislodging a vessel stranded on rocks?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question about terrorism.

It was a fine victory for the Conservatives to have these amendments withdrawn in committee. I thank my colleague for asking the question. This proves that he at least followed the committee's work on this bill. It was the committee as a whole, but mainly the Conservatives, that did the necessary work to have these amendments withdrawn.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Speaker, no matter how much we improve legislation and talk about amendments, if there is no judge to enforce the law, then Canadians end up with a system that does not work. That is what happened to Dannick Lessard, a constituent of mine who had to cope with seeing the man who tried to kill him released because of the Jordan decision.

Does my colleague agree that dealing with the shortage of judges in the justice system should be the top priority?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Madam Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. There are 59 vacancies in Canada's court system. That is disconcerting. If every judicial vacancy were filled, there would not be so many delays in the justice system.

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Madam Speaker, Bill C-75 is at report stage. The purpose of this bill, introduced by the Liberals, is to improve the compliance rate with the Jordan decision handed down by the Supreme Court in 2016 and to reduce the backlog in the justice system.

Unfortunately, we have heard many times that Bill C-75 was rushed. Some of the wording is very vague, and the bill does not meet the main objective, which is to improve the justice system so it works better for everyone.

One of the biggest disappointments, which was not addressed in committee, is the lack of bold reforms for the criminal justice system, such as abolishing the mandatory minimum sentences that proliferated under the Harper government. That is a major element, because unfortunately, although mandatory minimums are respected in most cases, there are many unusual cases for which judges would have liked to have some flexibility.

Unfortunately, judges' hands are often tied by mandatory minimum sentences, and they have no choice but to impose them, despite circumstances that can be extremely sad. I am thinking about the rise in “suicide by cop” attempts, which primarily involve police.

Some people reach a point in their lives where they are in extreme distress and feel suicidal. They sometimes threaten on-duty police officers with real guns or paintball guns, fake guns that look real, in order to get themselves shot. These situations are unfortunately known as “suicide by cop” and are a sign of someone who is suffering tremendously.

Gun crimes are often subject to mandatory minimum sentences. During the trial, if the judge recognizes that the problem is not a criminal issue, but an issue of mental illness or distress, and that the offender would be better off receiving treatment than being branded a criminal, this judge has very few legal options. I think it is especially important to give back some flexibility to judges by eliminating mandatory minimums. It is also important to understand that in cases where the accused truly committed the crime, the sentences go far beyond the mandatory minimums.

Mandatory minimum sentences often have a perverse effect on the justice system. They do not allow judges to consider the extenuating circumstances surrounding the events or the accused's past, experiences, personal situation or family responsibilities. Mandatory minimums allow for absolutely no flexibility.

Another problem this bill does not fix, a problem that impacts the justice system, is lack of financial support for victims and their families, as well as for the accused. The poverty threshold for access to legal aid is very low when the accused does not have a family or dependents. One must be very poor to get legal aid.

● (1555)

Some people simply cannot afford a lawyer. They cannot get legal aid because their income is too high. For example, a young man in his early twenties who earns $30,000 or $40,000 a year cannot get legal aid because his income is considered too high. There is no way he can afford $30,000 in legal fees, so he cannot get good legal advice. That young man will find himself caught up in a system that does not allow him access to legal advice.

The legal system also needs to take victims into consideration, because the whole process would go more smoothly if they had better support. In many cases, they get absolutely no support. Many a parent whose child was killed in a car accident, which is such a tragedy, says they have no access to resources of any kind, no financial support to attend court proceedings. They pay for everything out of pocket.

Lack of access to justice for financial reasons is a serious problem that hinders the effectiveness of our justice system. Bill C-75 does nothing to address that. In the case of both victims and the accused, we need to take a more logical approach and be able to support them. We must be able to ensure that they understand what is happening. For instance, when victims' families get completely lost in the procedures, they often have to pay for lawyers out of their own pockets in order to understand what is going on, get advice and figure out all the procedural rules. That is one particular aspect of the bill that could have been explored, or at least corrected, in committee. It still has not been corrected or addressed. I also have to say that, since it was not done at the outset, we were more limited.

Furthermore, if we want to make the judicial system more efficient, we absolutely must separate acts that genuinely criminally motivated from acts committed as a result of social problems. So many charges related to simple possession of any kind of drug wind up in court.

I think we will have to explore whether drug possession is actually more of a health problem. That is a very important issue that absolutely must be addressed.

In order to find a better solution, should we not consider drug possession and ultimately drug use as a health issue, rather than a criminal justice issue?

Would that not give us more time to focus on serious crimes and free up our judges who have to deal with offenders who have been charged with drug possession? I believe these offenders would be much better off if they were treated at a hospital and given quick access to detox services.

Would it not be better to treat these cases as health issues and save our resources to deal with cases involving serious sexual violence, human trafficking, sexual exploitation, and violence against indigenous women? Many such crimes are committed, and unfortunately, our justice system does not deal with them very effectively.

We could set better priorities by rethinking the way our justice system works. Many offences are related to social problems. People living in extreme poverty will commit small offences to try to survive. Is the solution to criminalize them or, on the contrary, is it to better address those social issues and dedicate our resources to people with truly sick criminal behaviour? I think we would all benefit from that.

● (1600)

Since my time is up, I now hope to provide thoughtful answers to my colleagues' questions.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue for her speech.

She spoke about access to justice for many people in Canada who cannot afford to hire a lawyer.

[*English*]

I want to underscore and ask for the member's comment on the changes that were made at committee that addressed this very important issue.

Something that was raised with us was the issue of when we are changing summary conviction offences and moving them to two years less a day in terms of the penalty, what does that mean in terms of those people who are either unrepresented or are represented by law students, paralegals or agents?

At committee, there has been an important change, which has been supported, that would allow the provinces and territories to change to 802.1 of the Criminal Code. That allows the provinces and territories to permit agents to appear on summary conviction offences that are punishable by more than six months of imprisonment.

Is that the kind of change the member is encouraged to see, because it would address the very access to justice issues she raised in her speech?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Speaker, obviously, having access to law students or people in the legal system who can provide representation can help. However, that does not work for every type of offence.

Access to law students often depends on having law schools nearby. There are no universities offering law programs in Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

The people in my riding will not have access to law students, even if the law changes. That is a fundamental problem.

If a 21-year-old has to take out a loan to pay $30,000 or $40,000 in legal fees, the rest of their life is ruined. This debt will have an impact on their life and career for 10, 15 or 20 years.

Even if the person earns too much to qualify for legal aid, legal fees are so high now that some people plead guilty simply because they cannot afford a lawyer.

● (1605)

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to address the issue of limiting preliminary inquiries.

The government, in Bill C-75, would limit preliminary inquiries to only when the maximum sentence is life behind bars. Anyone charged with an offence with a lesser maximum penalty would not have the benefit of a preliminary inquiry. However, the government has provided no empirical data to back up its assertion that this would reduce the backlog in our courts.

We heard a considerable amount of evidence before the justice committee that preliminary inquiries help narrow issues. They allow both parties to test their cases. They provide a discovery function, and in terms of data, 86% of cases that have a preliminary inquiry are resolved.

I wonder if the member could comment.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Abitibi—Témiscamingue has just over a minute to respond.

Ms. Christine Moore: Madam Speaker, I am very concerned that there will be no more preliminary inquiries. A preliminary inquiry is like a rehearsal for the trial. In particular, it is an opportunity to test the evidence.

Sometimes, the preliminary inquiry shows that there is no need for a trial. If there is no preliminary inquiry, that means that cases that do not need to go to trial will automatically go to trial anyway. There may be insufficient evidence, or it may be determined that the case does not meet the criteria for an indictable offence.

Preliminary inquiries are extremely important, especially given that the entire justice system will be competing against itself. For example, matrimonial cases are also dealt with in the same justice system. When a trial that could have been avoided is held anyway, less time is available for matrimonial cases. As a result, family cases that require immediate intervention by a judge take longer.

There are many aspects to consider, and I think that it was not a good idea to eliminate preliminary inquiries.

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am really pleased to join the debate. I have been listening for a few hours to what different members believe are the most important parts of the bill, the biggest defects and the biggest advantages given to it.

I thought the member for St. Albert—Edmonton gave one of the best, most succinct rundowns of the bill in terms of its many defects. It is an omnibus justice bill. I sit on the Standing Committee on Finance, so we are well versed on omnibus legislation there for three years now from the government, a government that during the last election promised not to ram any more omnibus legislation through the House. It was a promise that they have continuously broken since then. The Liberals failed to lived up to their promise.

The lens I want to give to this piece of legislation is mostly consideration of some of the hybridized offences in it. Like I have mentioned in the House before, I am not a member of the legal profession, so my eyes on it are basically the eyes of any regular member of the public and what they would think are serious offences versus non-serious offences.

We have been told that one of the reasons for this legislation is that it would drastically reduce the bottleneck at our provincial courts, that the court system would be somehow liberated from having to deal with all of these cases that are clogging it up and all the court delays.

With the Jordan decision rendered by the Supreme Court of Canada, that bottleneck of court cases is even more important now because we have individuals being charged with offences but never seeing a court or going through the system to be judged. I would call this piece of legislation as the Yiddish proverb says, the gift that is not as precious as first thought. There are so many defects that the member for St. Albert—Edmonton pointed out that would actually create an even greater bottleneck at the provincial courts.

Those courts closest to the people are the ones that deal with the vast majority of criminal offences. They deal with family law, young persons aged 12 to 17, traffic bylaw violations, regulatory offences, small claims and preliminary inquiries. The judges are actually doing most of the work. Every province has been set up slightly differently in how they proceed with different types of offences. Many of these would not be directly affected by this legislation, but the ones that deal with criminal offences would be because a great deal of the hybridized ones would be going to the provincial courts. The Liberals are not making it simpler, they are actually creating a greater bottleneck.

I thought that it was the House of Commons and the Senate that together decided what was a serious enough offence to warrant five to 25 years, not prosecutors. It is this House that decides on behalf of our constituents what are serious offences and what is deserving of consideration by a judge, whether a judge should consider the maximum offence of 25 years to life, whether it should be 15 years or 10 years. It is not up to prosecutors, who are not responsible to any constituents. They are not responsible directly to the public. They do not have to go to the public every four years and make a pitch for the retention of their job. Neither does a judge, but we ask judges to consider the particulars in an individual case and determine whether it warrants five years, 10 years, or something in between and to make a judicious decision based on the facts of the case. We would actually be taking away that ability of the justices to be able to render a decision.

I am sure there will be a member of the Liberal caucus who will stand and attack some past Conservative government's record, that we can go back and forth to the 19th century if we want to, to what previous governments did or other previous governments did not do, but we are looking at the record of the past three years. That is where the focus should be.

This piece of legislation comes to us as an omnibus bill. It should have come to us as pieces of legislation, different focus areas that could have been proposed in the House. It is not as if we have a maximum load that we can take on and afterwards we say we simply cannot take on any more legislation in the House. The government has shown a great interest in guillotine motions. The Liberals have used over 50 now, even after saying they would not do so and would allow fulsome debate in the House. There is no reason why this piece of legislation could not have been broken up into different pieces so that members could consider whether in fact criminal acts of sabotage were serious enough to perhaps warrant full consideration by indictable offence, and whether that would be the best way to proceed.

Forgery or uttering a forged passport, the selling or purchasing of an office, and the bribery of public officials are serious offences and there should be no opportunity for a prosecutor to elect to have them hybridized and go by summary conviction. The same applies to prison breach, assisting an escape, infanticide and participation in activities of a criminal organization.

● (1610)

Just this morning, as I was providing a tour for my constituents through the House of Commons, the Minister of Public Safety was outside announcing that the government would spend $86 million to fight organized crime. On this same day, his government is proposing that we hybridize the offence of participating in the activities of a criminal organization and handing such decisions over to a prosecutor to decide whether the offence is serious enough, even before a judge has a chance to listen to the facts of the case and an individual's particular circumstance or participation.

This is why I used this Yiddish proverb, “The gift is not as precious as first thought”. It is a very good proverb and someday I will be able to actually say it in Yiddish.

If the gift is that we are going to reduce the bottlenecks in our provincial courts and reduce wait times, then we need to appoint more judges so they can hear more cases.

Provincial governments should be looking at more court space. The City of Calgary built a brand new court building expressly because there was a problem with securing court space. Judges needed the space to hear cases.

If this legislation is the government's gift, if this legislation is its attempt to resolve the problem, and it is not worth it, then the government should go back to the drawing board. This legislation could be dealt with piece by piece and the parts that many members of the official opposition said they could agree with could be expedited to the other place.

To their credit, government members on the justice committee agreed that terrorism and genocide are pretty serious offences and, therefore, should not be hybridized. I think members would agree with me that the selling or purchasing of an office, and I do not mean in this case a corporate office, but an elected office, is a serious offence and does not deserve to be hybridized in any way.

It is a matter of process here. Had this omnibus piece of legislation been broken out into its parts and there been an attempt to reach consensus on certain parts, I think it would have passed, because we agree with most pieces of it. That has happened before in the House. I have seen all parties agree that a particular piece of legislation should pass more quickly than another. Maybe certain portions of Bill C-75 could have been passed more quickly. Instead, we are having a more fulsome debate so that members on all sides can explain the concerns their constituents have expressed about the contents of this legislation.

Sabotage is a serious crime. It should not be up to a prosecutor to decide whether it is deserving of a faster process because people are busy. Attorneys general in every single province give direction to their prosecutors. They are told to prioritize certain cases over others. There is only so much time in a prosecutor's day and I understand that cases need to be prioritized, and that is led by the attorney general of the respective province. That is a fair process.

At the same time, however, it is Parliament that is supposed to decide what is or is not a serious offence. What the government is doing here looks like a copy and paste job. It is just taking giant sections of the Criminal Code and dumping them into the bill. It is as if all of those sections should be hybridized in a vain attempt to find some type of time saving for judges. Judges will not have a chance to listen to the contents of every particular case like we expect them to do.

I will not be able to support this piece of legislation. It is simply defective in its content. It is defective in its process. Perhaps the small number of amendments that government members on justice committee accepted is a good step in the right direction. There should be far more amendments to this piece of legislation before it would, in any way, be permissible to pass it through the House.

● (1615)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Calgary Shepard for his contributions in the House.

With respect to judicial appointments, the Minister of Justice has appointed 235 judges thus far in each of the past few years. That is more judges than have been appointed by any minister of any political stripe in the last two decades, and it includes 34 judges in the member's province alone.

The member questions the ability to speed up the processes in compliance with the Jordan decision. I am going to put to him three statistics and I ask for his comments.

The first statistic is that an administration of justice offence is an offence such as breach of curfew. This type of offence has increased by 8% in the system since 2004. One in 10 incidents reported to the police involved an administration offence and four in 10 cases in adult criminal courts included at least one administration of justice offence.

Given those statistics would the member opposite agree with me that when we take those types of administration of justice charges, which are criminalized right now and are clogging up the system, and move them to a separate administrative judicial referral hearing, we are addressing the very backlog he has identified as a problem in this country for delivering justice more quickly?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, the member prefaced his commentary with statistics, and there is one point that I cannot pass up mentioning, because it was that justice minister who blew up the entire judicial advisory committee appointment process, where they heard advice from those committees on who should be appointed to become judges.

The Liberals created the system that led to the backlog of appointments, so they do not deserve any credit for any appointment they have made since then. The Liberals are the ones that caused the situation that they are catching up on to fix today.

Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate my friend's speech, but there were a number of things that I cannot agree with.

First of all, the member indicated that it should not be up to a prosecutor to determine the seriousness of an offence. I wonder if my hon. friend understands that currently 152 Criminal Code offences are hybrid offences, some of which can be very serious, including sexual assault. Some of these hybrid offences can be completed in a range of ways. We trust our Crown prosecutors to make determinations on a case-by-case basis every day.

Would the member not agree with me that the Crown does an effective job dealing with the cases before it, based on the circumstances of the offence?

● (1620)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, I listened intently to the previous contributions to the debate by the member.

He raises a good point. Right now prosecutors have a great deal of leeway in how they proceed with their cases. Again, as I mentioned, in cases such as sabotage, prison breach, participation in the activities of a criminal organization, I think the judge should be the one to determine, based on the matters of the case, both how long the person should spend in jail and the conditions, in cases where they convict the person of the crime involved.

It is the House that decides what the maximum and the minimum should be in those particular cases. The prosecutor makes the case; the defence defends them. We do entrust unto them a great deal of leeway. However, in cases of sabotage, as I mentioned, and selling or purchasing an office, infanticide, no, it should then be up to the judge to hear the complete case.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member for Calgary Shepard is absolutely right.

What this bill does is to take discretion away from judges to fashion sentences having regard for the individual circumstances of a case, and it puts it in the hands of prosecutors in a non-transparent and arbitrary way.

The member made reference to some of the offences that are hybridized. I would draw his attention to another, including selling young women and men into sexual slavery, as well as administering date rape drugs. If we are going down this road, where do we draw the line? Maybe murder should be a hybrid offence next.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Madam Speaker, the member for St. Albert—Edmonton is right.

Herein lies the problem, in that simply too many offences are being hybridized. If it were a piecemeal approach, section by section, and if they had combined them together into bite-sized pieces of legislation, including an easier way to explain why we are doing this, we would not be in a situation where the list of the offences the government is proposing to hybridize raises red flags all over the place.

This is the wrong way to build legislation. Omnibus justice legislation in the House simply does not work. It raises too many questions. Too many members have issues with particular sections they want to see removed. The government should go back to the drawing board and start over.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Madam Speaker, during this debate today we heard words such as hybridization, tough on crime and speeding up the judicial system. I will remind the House and Canadians who are listening and are tuned into this debate that it was probably on day 10 of the 2015 campaign that the member for Papineau said that, under his government, he would let debate reign and would not resort to such parliamentary tricks as closure and limiting debate. He also said his government would not resort to legislative tricks to avoid scrutiny, such as omnibus bills. Here we have a bill that is well over 350 pages long, legislation that encompasses three bills. I think that probably speaks more to the current government's legislative failure than a lot of other things.

One of the things the Liberals always say is that they are protecting Canadians. I do not feel that Bill C-75 does that. That said, I will preface my speech by saying that I am not a lawyer, nor do I profess to be one, but we have seen instances over the course of the last three years where the Liberals and the government like to say they are tough on crime and that they are standing up for victims' rights, and yet we have seen recently a convicted murderer being transferred to a healing lodge. She had a key to her room and could come and go as she pleased. This murderer had lured an eight year old away from her school and then she and her partner murdered young Tori Stafford. For weeks the Prime Minister and the Minister of Public Safety said that it was not in their power to change that. However, it was done. They probably blame the Conservatives for that, because they blamed us for politicizing this event. Then last week, Tori's father and family came to the Hill and protested on the steps of Parliament. They not only begged the Prime Minister and the minister to change that, but they also shamed them into changing the rules, and today, as a result of that public shaming, we saw the Liberals change the rules, and that murderer is now behind bars.

Why am I bringing this up? It is because we are talking about Bill C-75, which hybridizes certain offences that were previously dealt with by indictment only. Why were they classified by indictment? It is because they include some of the most serious offences. I know our hon. colleague from Calgary Shepard brought this up. Actually, his speech was bang on.

Let us talk about some of these offences that have now been hybridized. There is the punishment for infanticide, concealing the body of a child, abduction of a person under 16 or abduction of a person under 14, administering a noxious substance, and enslaving a male or female into prostitution. Those are some of the crimes that will be hybridized and take away the discretion of a judge to be able to levy serious punishment for some of these serious crimes.

I sat at committee during some of the testimony relating to Bill C-75. I had the opportunity to sit through two sessions of that. Criminal defence lawyers who witnessed at committee offered that, while there were some good changes in Bill C-75, one of the key points that was missing from the bill was the filling of judicial vacancies and how that would help.

I heard the arguments of those across the way who are blaming the previous government. The Liberals want to put their record up against the record of the Conservatives. As our hon. colleague from Calgary Shepard so aptly put it, why are they always doing that?

● (1625)

The Liberals have been in government now for three years, yet they always say we should have seen it when the Conservatives had it or could we imagine if the NDP had it. However, their failures are their own. At times, the Minister of Justice has held records for the most judicial vacancies.

I will offer this for our hon. colleagues across the way who are going to point their fingers at us. The Jordan decision came about in July of 2016. We would think the Jordan decision would have spurred the minister on to fill those judicial vacancies. Why is that such a key issue? In rural communities such as mine and other areas right across Canada, it is tough to get a judge at times. What happens is that those cases get thrown out. Prolific offenders in some of our communities are the ones who are getting out and 90% of the crimes are committed by them.

The Liberals talk about being tough on crime. The Minister of Public Safety could not say the word “murder”. Now it is a bad practice. The people who are crossing our borders illegally are now crossing the border irregularly.

Also, that brings me to another point. With Bill C-75, I cannot call my wife a spouse anymore. The term is “intimate partner”. I have never introduced my wife that way. I think I would probably get slapped. That goes along the lines of the Prime Minister's comments about “peoplekind”. We cannot say “mankind” anymore. It is “peoplekind” He said he was joking. I doubt it.

Service Canada is changing the vocabulary on its forms. It is removing “father, mother, Mr. Miss, Mrs.” I do not know whether my colleagues have ever introduced their partners or spouses as their intimate partners. It is ridiculous. How far we have fallen? It is crazy.

The Liberals said they were going to do away with omnibus bills. Here we have a 350-page document that does not give opposition members an opportunity to fully engage. It does not give the electors who elect opposition members an opportunity to fully have a say.

The government has shown contempt for the House time and again by closure and by continuing to table these omnibus bills. It is quite shameful.

The Liberals like to say that they are consulting with Canadians. By that, they mean they will invite somebody to speak for seven minutes at committee, and that is consultation. They also like to say they work collaboratively across the floor with the opposition and that all parties have a say. However, we know that it is their way or the highway, that they know best. It really is quite shameful. What the Liberals are doing and saying behind closed doors is completely different than what they want their public image to be. I should probably watch what I am saying. Maybe the Prime Minister will not agree to take a picture with me now.

Bill C-75 is flawed legislation. We have heard it is rushed legislation.

I want to go back to some of the hybridized offences, such as polygamy, forced marriage and marriage under the age of 16. If Canadians are listening, that is right. Their government wants to make forced marriage and marriage under the age of 16 a hybridized offence. That is shameful. Canadians should be afraid of that and alarmed at what the government is doing. It is not standing up for victims and it is making it harder for police agencies to do their job. This legislation is flawed.

● (1630)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am quite troubled by some of the comments of the member opposite. I appreciate the fact that there is an effort to simplify vocabulary and make things understandable for people in the chamber and those watching on television. However, the reason the definition of "intimate partner violence" is entrenched in law is because domestic violence and violence between sexual partners is a very troubling and problematic matter about which all parliamentarians should be concerned. Today in this chamber, even members of his caucus, in response to questions I raised or on their own volition, have agreed that the changes to intimate partner violence form a critical part of the legislation with which most members can agree.

I will give the member one more opportunity to not make light of the situation. Does he believe that when a definition is expanded so things like "strangulation", "choking" and "suffocation" are deemed an elevated form of assault that judges need to take note of when issuing orders and harsher sentences for such violence, whether it involves a current partner or a former partner, is a step in the right direction?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Speaker, I was not referring to that part of legislation. I was referring to the fact that we cannot talk about our spouse anymore as a spouse and we have to use the term "intimate partner". Violence against intimate partners, spouses or loved ones is shameful and wrong. I stand here unequivocally in support of what our colleague across the way has said. I question the terminology, not the law behind it.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is interesting to hear Conservatives try to come across as if they are really tough on crime and stand for the victims when it is just not true. Let me give the example of Tori Stafford. At least three times today, the Conservatives have stood in their place trying to give the impression they are really tough on crime. When Stephen Harper was the prime minister, murders were transferred to healing lodges, sadly, over 12 of them.

Could the member tell me why this so-called tough on Stephen Harper Conservative Party crime file did nothing on those files, on those child killers? Why were they allowed to go to medium-security prisons when the Conservatives sat in government?

● (1635)

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Speaker, I was not elected at the time so cannot comment on that. However, I can comment on the current Prime Minister and the current Minister of Public Safety's inability to get the job done and act when it matters the most. Instead, it took the family of Tori Stafford to come to Ottawa to publicly shame and beg the Prime Minister and minister to act, and that is shameful.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member for Cariboo—Prince George went through a long list of what are currently serious indictable offences the government is watering down by reclassifying them to be hybrid offences. Another offence he did not mention, which I would be interested in his comments on, is impaired driving causing bodily harm.

We know impaired driving is the leading criminal cause of death in Canada. However, instead of holding to account those individuals who make the choice to drink and drive and, as a result, injure another person, the government is going to hybridize that offence. What kind of message does that send?

Mr. Todd Doherty: Madam Speaker, I was not going to touch on that because, as most in the House know, my brother Fabian was killed by a drunk driver on March 17, 1990. It is shameful what the government is doing. To hybridize bodily harm by impaired driving is shameful. It begs the question as to what the thoughts of Mothers Against Drunk Driving are on this, because it just revictimizes us and brings up the old wounds of those we have lost.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): 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 Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Poverty.

[*English*]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Haldimand—Norfolk.

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to add my insight to this very important discussion surrounding Bill C-75, an act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other acts and to make consequential amendments to other acts. I am speaking on behalf of the constituents in my beautiful riding of Haldimand—Norfolk.

As we know, one of the core functions of government is to provide a framework and a set of laws to protect those who it governs, whether it be through the creation and maintenance of a strong military to defend us from foreign threats or, as is more applicable to today's discussion, to protect Canadians from domestic threats and administer just consequences for those who break the law. We, as Conservatives, take this very seriously.

Before speaking to the shortcomings of the bill, I agree with the reforms proposed to deal with repeat offenders of violence against intimate partners. I see this as a step in the right direction.

That said, with the few steps forward that are made in Bill C-75, the Liberals seem to run backward with much of the rest of this bill. The Liberal Party, in particular the Prime Minister, seems to jump to the defence of serious offenders and violent criminals, disregarding the rights of victims.

The previous Conservative government worked hard on behalf of Canadians and on behalf of victims. We brought forward legislation designed to reduce the revictimization that occurred because of shortcomings in our justice system, bills like the Tackling Violent Crime Act come to mind. That one implemented conditions such as a reverse onus on bail, which requires that those accused of serious gun crimes show why they should not be kept in jail while awaiting trial.

Our initiatives aimed at ending the revolving door form of justice that was all too common and put people who had committed serious crimes, particularly serious gun crimes, back out on the street with bail. This law was targeted squarely at organized crime and tackling gun violence. The Tackling Violent Crime Act also introduced tougher mandatory jail times for serious gun crimes, which again targeted organized criminals and gangs.

The truth is that tougher and longer sentences are about deterrence and protecting society from violent and dangerous offenders. Violent and dangerous behaviour cannot be changed simply by prematurely returning an offender to the environment that bred that very behaviour in the first place. Sadly, the Liberal position seems to be quite the opposite.

Of course we all recall the recent transfer of Terri-Lynne McClintic from the Grand Valley Institution in Kitchener to a healing lodge with no fence around it. Rightly, Canadians were outraged. They were outraged that one of Canada's most notorious criminals, convicted of first-degree murder in the kidnapping, rape and killing of an eight year old, was being moved to such a weakly enforced facility. What was the Liberal response to Canadians' outrage? It was a vehement defence of that decision. Yes, it is sad, but unfortunately that is true.

This speaks to the low position that victims have in the eyes of the Liberal government. It speaks to the undeniable Liberal bent toward making life better for even the most offensive and deplorable criminals. This bill further displays that view.

The number and types of offences that could result in lighter sentencing as a result of the bill, even going so far as to reducing some of them to just a fine, sends a clear message to victims and also to criminals.

I think that most of us would agree that Canadians are largely compassionate, willing to forgive and give second chances to people who might have made some bad choices. That said, the types of offences that the Liberals seem to be making light of in Bill C-75 are well beyond what Canadians would consider just bad choices.

● (1640)

Offences like participation in the activities of a terrorist group and leaving Canada to participate in terrorist group activities may now see reduced sentences. This includes people who have left Canada for the sole purpose of joining and fighting with ISIS. For a Prime Minister who claims to be a progressive and a feminist, it is hard to see how granting a softer consequence for ISIS fighters fits this narrative. This is a group that represents the very antithesis of everything Canada represents and tries to be. These people burn homosexuals alive and throw them from buildings. They take sex slaves. They commit public mass executions, and they have declared war against our own western values, but the Prime Minister and the justice minister think that perhaps a softer touch is the best way to deal with ISIS fighters.

Again, as concerning as this is, sadly, based on what we have already seen from the government, it is not surprising. The Prime Minister seems to think that government programming to reintegrate returning ISIS members is a suitable option.

We all remember Omar Khadr. Mr. Khadr is directly and admittedly responsible for the grenade attack that led to the death of allied U.S. special forces Sergeant Christopher Speer and the injury of retired U.S. special forces Sergeant Layne Morris. Is Khadr in jail? Courtesy of the Prime Minister, he is now $10.5 million richer, thanks to the Canadian taxpayer. Canadians are appalled, and rightly so.

The bill also brings in softer sentencing for, among other things, advocating genocide, participating in activities of criminal organizations, arson for fraudulent purposes, human trafficking-related offences and material benefit for sexual services. Listening to the list of some of these offences on which the Liberals are going soft, one really cannot help but wonder if some of the stakeholders who were consulted on the bill were actually organized crime leaders.

Municipal corruption, selling or purchasing office, influencing appointments or dealing in offices may also receive lighter sentencing. One cannot help but wonder what the Liberals are preparing for with these types of changes.

In all seriousness, the list goes on and on. Even the abduction of a child, a defenceless child like Tori Stafford, could see lighter sentencing under the Liberals' soft-on-crime bill. Back home in Haldimand—Norfolk, people are shocked to hear that these are the views of the modem Liberal Party and our Prime Minister. They are shocked by the disregard for victims of crime shown by bills like Bill C-75. They are baffled by the doublespeak of the Liberals, who claim in one breath to be opposed to gun crime but then introduce bills like Bill C-71, which provides no meaningful way of addressing illegal gun crime but implies that law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters are part of the problem. They, like Canadians right across this great country, are genuinely concerned that the soft-on-crime policies of the Liberals are going to put their communities and their families at greater risk.

There are some good aspects of the bill, but they are needles in a 300-page haystack of bad policies. I do not recall reading about reduced sentencing for terrorists, child abductors and organized crime members in the Liberals' election platform. I did not see it in the justice minister's mandate letter, and I would wager good money that no Liberal candidates will put that in any of their next campaign literature. I am confident that this is not the mandate Canadians gave them, nor would they in 2019.

I implore the Liberals to take this monster of a bill, split it up into more reasonable-size bills, and set their partisan, self-serving tactics aside so the House can come together and vote in agreement for the good bits that are in Bill C-75. Then we can have a more thorough debate on the merits of the rest of the policies and a discussion about the lack of a mandate from Canadians to legislate the rest of it.

● (1645)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will start with a comment and end with a question.

Hybridization occurs regularly throughout the Criminal Code. It did under the previous government's watch, and it continues to occur today. Over 100 offences are already hybridized. Hybridization is about giving the Crown attorney a choice to proceed summarily or to proceed by way of an indictable offence. It does not predetermine the sentence, and the choice is critical, as highlighted in the instance of kidnapping. It can be extremely heinous, in the context of kidnapping someone who is then trafficked for prostitution, or it can be in a context that is usually much more benign, such as the case of a parent who shares custody with an estranged spouse who simply extends a stay with a grandparent and has the child for an extra day. Those require different responses by Crown attorneys.

The member spent a lot of time debating whether our government's position on crime is sufficient or tough enough, from her perspective. How does she explain the fact that under our government's watch, all summary conviction offences are moving from six months to two years less a day, a much more significant penalty for those types of offences?

Hon. Diane Finley: Mr. Speaker, kidnapping is kidnapping is kidnapping. I do not think anyone reasonable on a police force would describe grandparents having a child for an extra day as kidnapping or even be in a position to lay those charges. We are talking about kidnapping, where there is the option of getting them a much lighter sentence.

The Liberals say that they are going to be tough. The other day, we had the apology in the House for the terrible situation of the MS *St. Louis*, and the Prime Minister said that this kind of intolerance and bias should never be allowed to happen again, yet one of the Liberal government's very first actions was to eliminate the Office of Religious Freedom and bring in Bill C-51, which tried to take away protection for religious freedom for those who practise it.

On the one hand, the Liberals talk a good line, but when we watch their actions, it is a whole other thing.

● (1650)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I disagree with the member's comments regarding kidnapping. There is a significant difference, and to try to marginalize one or play up another is wrong. Let me give a different example.

Within the legislation, there is going to be a reduction in pretrials. Imagine being a sexually assaulted woman. As opposed to having to go through a pretrial, because of this legislation, that pretrial could be avoided. She would not have to relive that horror, that nightmare, because of not having to go through a pretrial.

Does the member not see that as a good thing? If someone is a victim, why would the member want to obligate her to go perhaps through a pretrial, when it is just not necessary?

Hon. Diane Finley: Madam Speaker, there are a number of ways those kinds of situations have been dealt with successfully and sensitively in the past. What the bill would do in allowing so many of these very serious crimes to be hybridized is download them to the provinces. In many cases, the provinces are already overburdened. Their justice systems are loaded.

The minister herself has said that this bill would speed up the process at the federal level. Of course it would, because they would just be shifting the workload to the provinces, which have neither the time nor the capacity. That is going to help the federal stats, but it is not going to do anything to fight gangs. It is not going to do anything about gun crimes. It is not going to punish those or act as more of a deterrent to those who commit the very crimes the Liberal government says it wants to fight the most. It would not do that. In fact, it would reduce, in many cases, these very serious crimes to a slap on the wrist, to be handled by someone else, instead of the federal government taking responsibility for what it should be responsible for.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-75.

Throughout the day today, we have heard a lot of rhetoric from the other side in terms of what Bill C-75 would actually do. We have heard that this is progressive legislation. It would protect victims, it would strengthen the Criminal Code, it is reflective of what Canadians want to see, and it would create safer communities. However, the bill would actually reduce the penalties for many offences. Over 25 offences would be reduced with the introduction of the bill. I will speak a little more on that later.

Some of the objectionable parts of what is happening today relate to the process that brought us to where we are today. During the campaign, I remember sitting in many all-candidates debates and being told that if the Liberals were elected to government, they would not use time allocation to limit debate on important bills, but here we are today with I do not know how many dozens of times the government has implemented closure.

We were also told that omnibus bills were something to be avoided at all costs. However, here we have a bill that deals with three substantive issues that were actually part of three previous bills. It is over 300 pages long and lumps together all kinds of reforms. Some of them we support, but this omnibus bill is impossible to support in its entirety, and I will outline my reasons for that as I proceed.

This proposed piece of legislation, as we have seen time and time again in the actions of the Liberal government, would actually do very little for victims of crime. It would actually reduce the potential consequences for criminals. It has become a pattern with the government to put the rights of criminals ahead of the rights of victims.

Thankfully, today one of the government's failures has had a positive resolution, with the re-incarceration of Tori Stafford's murderer, Terri-Lynne McClintic.

When Tori Stafford's father found out that Terri-Lynne McClintic was being transferred to a healing lodge, he raised objections through a number of contacts with individuals and he organized protests here on the Hill, which I was able to attend to hear the concerns of Rodney Stafford and his family and how they had been impacted by the relocation of Terri-Lynne McClintic to a healing lodge. They were very concerned about that, and many Canadians joined them. They showed their concern by coming to the protests here on Parliament Hill. Last Saturday, hundreds of people in the Woodstock area joined together in front of the Woodstock courthouse to register their concerns about the fact that Terri-Lynne McClintic was being housed in a healing lodge, way before the time she was due to be released.

We agree that we need to have rehabilitation, but to have someone put in a healing lodge more than 10 years before their eventual release is certainly an inappropriate way to be treating our criminals and especially to have concern for victims.

I am still disturbed by the government's continuing soft-on-crime soft spot for criminals. Currently I am dealing with the issue of the prison needle exchange program at the Grand Valley Institution for Women in the Waterloo region. This program puts needles into the hands of hardened criminals so they can use illicit drugs in their own prison cells. We are not talking about EpiPens or insulin syringes administered by nurses. We are talking about needles being handed to prisoners to administer drugs to themselves in their own cells.

Rightly, the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers has come out against this, as it puts their members in danger. They were not consulted at all on the implementation of this pilot project that is being carried out at the Grand Valley Institution for Women. They have held protests outside the offices of the health minister and the Minister of Public Safety, but it seems that the government is just turning a blind eye to this illegal substance problem in our prisons.

Not only do I stand with the Union of Canadian Correctional Officers on this issue, I am also very concerned about my community in Waterloo region. These prisoners who are using the prison needle exchange program can maintain an addiction throughout their entire sentences, and their participation in the exchange program will not even be shared with the Parole Board when their application is made for parole. Therefore, it is quite probable and possible that we will have cases of criminals returning to our communities still addicted to substances that may have played a role in the behaviour that led them to commit their crimes in the first place.

● (1655)

I hope my colleagues in the Liberal Party will realize how we in the Conservative Party have a hard time believing that they are tough on crime when they encourage these types of programs in our prisons.

As a Conservative, I believe that the safety of Canadians should be the number one priority of any government. On this side of the aisle, we will always work to strengthen the Canadian criminal justice system rather than weaken it. We will continue to stand up for victims.

That is why today the leader of my party was in Brampton laying out the Conservative plan that cracks down on guns and gangs. This plan has five proposals.

The first is ending automatic bail for gang members. Right now, even the most notorious gang members are entitled to bail. That means dangerous criminals who are known to police often go right back out on the streets. This is a dangerous risk to our communities and wastes valuable police resources. A Conservative government would change that and make sure that arrested repeat gang offenders would be held without bail.

The second is identifying gangs in the Criminal Code. Every time prosecutors go after gang members, they must first prove to the court that their gangs are criminal organizations. This includes well-known gangs like MS-13 and Hells Angels. This makes no sense. It is another huge waste of resources. A Conservative government would create and maintain a list of proven criminal organizations, which would help law enforcement prosecute gang members more quickly.

The third is revoking parole for gang members. Parole is a privilege, not a right. Currently, paroled offenders are required to abstain from drugs and alcohol and promise to keep the peace. A Conservative government would also require those on parole to cut ties with gangs. Statistics show offenders are more likely to reoffend on parole if they are part of a gang. For those who associate with gangs while on parole, the message would be simple: they go back to jail.

The fourth is tougher sentences for ordering gang crime. Right now, gang leaders who order others to commit crimes can receive very short sentences in prisons, often served alongside other gang members. A Conservative government would bring in mandatory sentences in federal prison for directing gang crime, sending a strong message to gang members that they belong behind bars.

The fifth is new sentences for violent gang crime. Gang-related murders, assaults, robberies and other violent acts are steadily on the rise and pose the biggest threat to Canadians' safety. A Conservative government would create new offences for committing and ordering violent gang crime and attach mandatory sentences in federal prison for each.

Conservatives understand that a strong criminal justice system must always put the rights of victims and communities ahead of special treatment for perpetrators of violent crime. The Prime Minister is failing to take seriously criminal justice issues. Reducing penalties for serious crimes sends the wrong message to victims, law-abiding Canadians and criminals. As such, we are concerned with the Liberals' proposal to eliminate consecutive sentences for human trafficking and to eliminate the victim surcharge introduced by the previous Conservative government to help victims of crime.

The Liberals are breaking yet another promise. They committed to keep full protections in place for religious officials under section 176 of the Criminal Code. Assault on officiants during a religious service is a very serious crime and should remain an indictable offence. We have serious concerns with other elements of this bill as well, including the number and types of offences that could result in lighter sentencing, including fines, for what are very serious crimes. Under the proposed changes, several serious offences could be prosecuted by summary conviction and, therefore, could result in lighter sentences.

I want to outline, for the benefit of anyone watching this today, some of the changes in Bill C-75 that would result from the passing of this bill. It is quite probable that the penalties for these indictable offences, among many others, would be reduced. On this list are prison breach, municipal corruption, influencing municipal officials and obstructing or violence to or arrest of an officiating clergyman. I mentioned that earlier in my speech. When there is a rise in many of these crimes across North America, this is not the time to be reducing sentences. There are many others on this list.

● (1700)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member for Kitchener—Conestoga a question with respect to the constituents he represents who are members of the LGBTQ2 community. Those constituents are directly affected by this bill in two important regards. We have removed the vagrancy and bawdy house provisions, which brings the bill into conformity with constitutional decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada. It would allow the expungement of records that existed for the violation of those Criminal Code provisions that were inherently discriminatory.

Second, and most importantly, a provision has been changed whereby section 159 of the Criminal Code has been removed. The impact of that would be to treat a consenting sexual relationship between a heterosexual couple aged 16 and 17 and a LGBT couple aged 16 or 17 exactly the same way. I wonder if the member would indicate his support for those types of changes because of the important impact they would have on the LGBTQ2 community in his own riding.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I will always stand for any protection that is included in the Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, regardless of sexual orientation.

It is not good enough to hide behind that when we look at the long list of other offences here that are very serious offences that my constituents have concerns about. I have been contacted directly by my constituents about some of this. In fact, I just happened to be working today on my responses to a number of letters I have received. One of them clearly said we need to be clearer on the consequences for serious crimes that are being committed in our area. One of them referred to the use of drugs. That is a big concern, and I am very concerned that not only are we lightening these sentences, we are now giving the tacit message to our population that the use of drugs is okay by the legalization of marijuana. It is not appropriate.

● (1705)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the past few months and years, there has been a lot of discussion about crimes involving sexual violence, especially against women. We have shown just how ineffective the justice system is at dealing with these cases and how badly a different approach is needed. We want to keep victims from being traumatized by their experience in the justice system.

Does the bill before us today solve the problems in the justice system concerning cases of sexual violence, or does it fail to make any concrete improvements for victims?

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, this gets to the heart of one of the problems with dealing with an omnibus bill that incorporates so many different aspects to these reforms. I support some of the aspects of the bill, in fact the one that deals with intimate partner violence. Absolutely, we want to make sure that the message is given that this is absolutely inappropriate and must be rooted out.

When we have this omnibus bill with so many other elements introduced into it, it makes it impossible for us to support that initiative because there are so many other initiatives in it that are totally wrong-headed.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my friend from Kitchener—Conestoga went through a list of offences that the government is watering down. One he did not highlight that I would be interested in his comments on is a breach of the long-term supervision order. These orders involve the most serious sexual offenders. These are individuals who are so dangerous that following the conclusion of their sentence they are subject to an order for up to 10 years, administered and overseen by the Parole Board of Canada. When these individuals breach these orders, it is a clear sign that they are returning to their cycle of dangerous criminal behaviour.

I would submit this is just another example of why Bill C-75, in terms of reclassification, is so badly thought out, so badly drafted and puts public safety at risk. I wonder if the member would agree.

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not pretend to have anywhere close to the knowledge that the member has of the legal justice system. I certainly agree that we need to do everything we can to give a strong message that any of these breaches will not be tolerated.

I want to come back to my earlier point that there is such a long list of lightening of sentences here that it gives me great concern for my entire community, and in fact for the whole country.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be here to talk about Bill C-75.

I think that the House now knows that I was a diplomat for 15 years. I was assigned to Argentina first, then to Salvador, and finally to Dallas, Texas. I also had the opportunity to work for my colleague from Thornhill when he was Minister of State of Foreign Affairs for the Americas. I found it very interesting, since we had the strategy for the Americas.

[*English*]

There we had three major principles that we followed in everything that we did.

The first was the idea of democracy. As shadow minister for democratic institutions, democracy is very close to my heart.

The second principle was that of prosperity, promoting free markets. I remember the Brazilians did not like this. They said we thought everyone should be rich but that was not our way of thinking at all. Rather, we chose to promote free markets abroad.

The third principle was justice, and this bill flies in the face of the principle of justice. Is this really the example that Canada wants to set for the world in terms of what would be established as a result of Bill C-75?

When I was consul for Canada to San Salvador in El Salvador there was a very unfortunate incident whereby a Canadian was found with narcotics. The individual was in a taxi. The cab was pulled over and unfortunately the narcotics fell out of some tissue paper. The individual was brought to jail and put on trial. As the consul for Canada at the time, I was asked to attend the proceedings. This was a very difficult situation for me. It was probably the most difficult that I had as a diplomat. I received a speech from the judge who indicated that fighting narcotics in his opinion at that time, in 2006, was one of the primary tenets of the western world.

My point is this. It is not this situation specifically but it goes back to the point that I am trying to make in regards to the deficiencies in this legislation. This legislation would not only cause delays but would propose lighter sentences. Is this really the example that Canada wants to set for the rest of the world? I absolutely think not.

I will go through some of the lighter sentencing items that my colleagues have gone through, some quite extensively. The bill would reduce penalties for crimes that include, but are not limited to, participation in activity of terrorist groups, leaving Canada to participate in activity of terrorist groups, punishment of rioter and concealment of identity, and breach of trust by a public officer.

Let me go back to participation in activity of terrorist groups and leaving Canada to participate in activity of terrorist groups. I daresay that it has historically been a major component of not only Canada's foreign affairs agenda but I would also argue our aid agenda and our defence agenda to fight against these crimes in the world. Is Bill C-75 the example that we want to set for the world?

● (1710)

Another item that stands out to me is "Obstructing or violence to or arrest of officiating clergyman". I see my delightful colleague, the hon. member for Calgary Shepard in the House. I worked, side by side, with him at his round table that he had for clergy. God bless him. I am sure they always do, but they did have the fear of God regarding the potential change that would result from this legislation. I daresay they might again today, seeing that these penalties can potentially be reduced. It very well might embolden some. That is also very concerning.

Moreover, there is the offence of "advocating genocide". That is something that we as a nation should be in the lead against. We are indicating in Bill C-75 that perhaps it is not such a priority that we have said it is to the world by reducing the sentencing for advocating such a thing. I think that is shame. Again I ask, is this the example, as found in Bill C-75, that Canada wants to set for the world?

Also, I am going to go to one of the last items on the list, and that is "Participation in activities of criminal organization". This is one that is very dear to me, again, having served in El Salvador, a place that unfortunately has much gang violence, with many negative effects on society there.

In addition to being the consul and the chef d'affaires during my time in El Salvador, I was also very fortunate to sit on the Canada fund as a member to decide the allocation of funding for programs. Every single time, we would put these funds towards activities that would discourage gang violence, primarily towards youth, to get them involved in physical activities and with youth organizations, so they could have other interests that would allow them to believe and see that they were worthwhile and worthy, and could contribute to society.

This would be a good time for me to indicate that I am very proud of our leader today and the legislation that he has brought forward in regard to gangs for a safer Canada. This includes ending automatic bail for gangsters, identifying gangs in the Criminal Code, revoking parole for gangsters, tougher sentences for ordering gang crime, and new sentences for violent gang crime, something that I believe, given my experience, given my work in Canada and abroad, is something that is very timely and necessary for a safer Canada.

I do believe that we should all get behind our leader and his message of a safer Canada in promoting and supporting this legislation, because I have seen the end result of where gang violence takes over a society. It is not a pretty picture. It affects all areas of society. Again, I ask, is Bill C-75 the example Canada wants to set for the world?

In conclusion, I will say this to my counterpart, the Minister of Democratic Institutions.

● (1715)

[*Translation*]

He said that he came to the House of Commons specifically to change the law with regard to valid ID for voting. I myself came here to promote democracy. Prime Minister Stephen Harper's administration did so much for democracy, prosperity and justice. That is why I cannot support Bill C-75, since it goes against Canadians and our position in the world.

[*English*]

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments by the member opposite and salute her contributions to Canada while serving in the foreign service in the past. While I am tempted to ask her a question about the disenfranchisement of all of the Canadians abroad under the previous government while she was serving those Canadians abroad in El Salvador, etc., I want to ask her about Bill C-75.

The member asked repeatedly about whether this is something we should be proud of and whether it is the kind of symbolic representation we want to make toward the world. I have a comment and a question.

We do want to be known as a government that takes discrimination against indigenous people seriously, and a government that listens to those very same foreign counterparts she served in her various roles in the foreign service, like England, which eliminated peremptory challenges in 1988. Those challenges are basically discriminatory, as they would allow a homogenous jury to render a verdict in the case of a white farmer accused of killing an indigenous man in Saskatchewan. I would put to her that ending peremptory challenges is something we want to be known for around the world.

Would she agree that it is also good to be known around the world for taking a substantive stand against intimate partner violence, something the member for Cariboo—Prince George questioned in a somewhat mocking manner in the chamber? Also, by expanding the definition to include dating partners and former spouses and ensuring that we have tougher penalties on intimate partner violence, is that the exact kind of stand she would like our government and this Parliament to take against violence against women?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, what I will say is that I am very proud of the Harper administration and, along with that, my predecessor Jason Kenney. Also, I am very fortunate to know the Hon. John Baird very well. I believe all of them worked together to promote the principles of democracy, prosperity and justice in the world. It was this type of leadership that saw us do many great things during that time of the Harper administration. Therefore, I do not believe that the reduction of sentences for these significant atrocities against humankind would do anything to further our place in the world. I will always stand very much behind and encourage the types of stands we saw from Minister Kenney, Minister Baird and certainly Prime Minister Harper. I really look forward to returning to those practices again very soon under a Conservative government.

● (1720)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, although the bill in question includes some measures concerning domestic violence, many stakeholders and victims of sexual violence have said that the existing justice system does not meet current needs and is not adapted to the reality of sexual violence. It can often be a traumatic experience for victims.

Although it contains measures related to domestic violence, is the bill before us today a major reform of the justice system when it comes to sex crimes, or is that far from the case, and does it in fact lack the reforms needed to make the justice system work better for victims of sexual violence?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Mr. Speaker, I cannot think about Bill C-75 or genocide without thinking about the work done by my colleague from Calgary Nose Hill. I can honestly say that our party supports victims of genocide, including women. As I said before, I cannot support Bill C-75, because that would be tantamount to opposing victims of genocide.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my turn to rise to speak to Bill C-75, an omnibus bill that is over 300 pages long, even though I very clearly remember the government promising not to introduce any omnibus bills. Unfortunately, the Liberals did not keep their promise.

Bill C-75 has the Liberal stamp on it. At second reading, the Liberals moved a time allocation motion on Bill C-75. They do not want to hear the truth when they introduce bills and they do not want to hear what the opposition has to say. Nevertheless, the members of the opposition represent Canadians the same way government members do, and so what we have to say deserves to be heard.

Since time is quickly running out, I will get right to the point. The Liberal government's inaction on justice has consequences.

One of my constituents was the victim of the Liberal government's inaction on justice on two occasions. His name is Dannick Lessard. He was the victim of a crime and he was the victim of an error on the part of Corrections Canada. He was also a victim of the Jordan decision. He watched as his assailant, the man who shot him, was set free without any other charges being brought against him.

It is absolutely unbelievable that, despite this voluminous bill, the government is doing absolutely nothing to address the case of Dannick Lessard, a man who did not ask to be victimized several times, not only by a criminal but also by the government. He was also the victim of the government's dogged determination to ignore his case.

To date, Mr. Lessard has racked up $80,000 in legal fees just so he can get his point across, get the government to listen to reason and be able to move on to other things.

The government has become an expert in victimization, which is completely unacceptable.

I would like remind everyone of what happened to Mr. Lessard, so they know what we are talking about.

Mr. Lessard was shot by a man armed with two pistols. He was hit nine times. He suffered many physical and psychological injuries. That act of unspeakable violence turned his life upside down. That is what he wrote in a letter addressed to several people.

On April 21, 2017, a stay of proceedings was ordered under the Jordan decision for the trial that was to be held in September 2017 of a man charged with first degree murder as well as the attempted murder of Mr. Lessard.

That ruling effectively ended any chance that Mr. Lessard's case would be heard and that justice would be served. At the time, he asked one question, and he still has not received an answer.

Is it reasonable that his attacker does not have to face justice for such a violent and gratuitous crime? Is it reasonable for Mr. Lessard to live the rest of his life with the scars from that attack? He believes that as a consequence of the Jordan decision, victims and the public have lost confidence in the Canadian justice system.

What does Bill C-75 propose to do about appointing more judges? Absolutely nothing. It is all very well to make laws, present amendments and talk for hours in committee, but if there is no one on the bench to manage these situations, it will not do any good.

Mr. Lessard wants the government to acknowledge the mistakes it made in his case. He wants the government to acknowledge that mistakes were made in the case of his attacker, who was wrongly released.

It is scandalous that an attacker who should be in prison is released to commit another crime and then has all charges dropped. Meanwhile, the government gave Omar Khadr $10 million.

This is a case of a citizen who was just doing his job and got shot. He was the victim, and today he is looking for help. He wrote to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Public Safety. The Minister of Public Safety was the only one to reply. Unfortunately, in his reply, he said that the Minister of Justice was responsible for this file.

What happens when the buck gets passed? Nothing is resolved.

We absolutely have to think of the people who are victims of the system. The system did not work, and the government is taking too long to appoint judges for various reasons. Unfortunately, people are waiting and spending a fortune trying to get justice. The government should be more understanding and address the situation as quickly as possible.

Since Bill C-75 does not resolve Mr. Lessard's case, I will be voting against it.

● (1725)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable will have four minutes remaining for his speech when the House resumes debate on this motion, as well as a 10-minute period for questions and comments.

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

● (1730)

[*English*]

NATIONAL LOCAL FOOD DAY ACT

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP) moved that Bill C-281, An Act to establish a National Local Food Day, be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to rise today for third reading of my bill, Bill C-281, to create a national local food day the Friday before Thanksgiving every year.

For those at home who are not familiar with private members' bills or how they work, when we become a member of Parliament, our name go into a hat. There were 338 names put into a hat. Names are drawn out and whichever spot our name comes up in becomes the number of our bill. I was about 111 with respect to private members' bills.

The first introduction of my bill was on June 1 of 2016, and then it was almost two years later, May 30, that my bill was debated at second reading. A number of members of Parliament from all parties gave some really inspiring speeches about how important local food was in their ridings. I very much thank them for that.

From there, the bill went to the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food and it was approved unanimously on June 20. I would like to thank the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford for his support at the agriculture committee.

Why is local food important and why is there support right across Canada for my bill? I will start locally.

In the summer of 2018, I went on a farmers' market tour around my riding. My riding is 64,000 square kilometres and there are a lot of communities to visit. I attended farmers' markets with my tent and table in 10 communities. In the 11th community, I had the privilege of opening the summer market. Over the course of the summer, I was in Fernie, Jaffray, Cranbrook, Creston, Salmo, Nelson, Revelstoke, Golden, Radium, Invermere and Kimberley. Everywhere I went, people were excited about local food and the national local food day bill.

Why is that? It is because local food benefits us in so many different ways. First, it is healthy. We know where it comes from when it is grown locally. It is important to food security. We do not have to import food that we grow locally, and food security is going to become a growing issue internationally, particularly with climate change. It benefits the local economy. I know the farmers' market in Cranbrook, after about three years of being in existence, was generating over $1 million a year in benefit to the economy.

Going around to the various communities this summer and participating in the farmers' markets, I met tourists from all over Canada and the world who had come to farmers' markets in local communities. Therefore, it also benefits tourism, as well as the economy and food security.

One of the fastest growing agriculture products in Canada is organic food, which people can get at farmers' markets, as well as many local grocery stores. According to Canada Organic, organic food, comprised mostly of fresh vegetables and fruit, was valued at $4.4 billion in 2017, with 66% of Canadian shoppers saying they bought organic food, and that is on the increase.

Growing food locally is also a benefit to the environment. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released its report on October 10. One of the key messages that came out very strongly from this report was that we were already seeing the consequences of 1°C of global warming through more extreme weather, rising sea levels, among other changes. At the current rate of warming, the world is likely to reach 1.5°C between 2030 and 2052.

Locally grown or harvested food has a much smaller carbon dioxide footprint than food imported from around the world. It is essential to our food security. Increasingly, locally grown food is one important way to fight climate change.

A few weeks ago during question period, a question was raised about the impact on climate change of greenhouse marijuana grow operations that used a lot of electricity and plastics. The best way to counter that from an environment perspective is for the government to give priority to outdoor marijuana grow operations. I can assure everyone that marijuana farmers in the Kootenays are ready to do their part to help save the planet.

● (1735)

In addition to hearing directly from people, there was a petition that circulated around the riding this summer, which again drew support from across Canada. That petition talked about the need to strengthen the connection between consumers and producers of Canadian food and the need to support our local farmers. The petition underlined that a national local food day to celebrate food is one of the most elemental characteristics of all of the cultures that populate this nation. Therefore, it called upon the Government of Canada to support the NDP's Bill C-281, an act to establish a national local food day, and designate the Friday before Thanksgiving every year as national local food day.

We also circulated postcards. One of those postcards invited people to draw and send back to us what they thought represented local food. Three-year-old Madeleine from greater Vancouver sent me a postcard with a carrot drawn on it, and Lisa from Saskatoon sent a card back saying “Local Vegetables - Hooray!”, so there is a lot of support from that perspective.

There is also a lot of support from other organizations, including provincial governments. I will start with British Columbia's Minister of Agriculture, Lana Popham, who sent us a letter. It reads:

> I am writing in support of Private Member Bill, C-281: An Act to establish a National Local Food Day.
>
> ...The establishment of a National Local Food Day encourages Canadians to choose local food products and supports our farmers, ranchers, fishers, hunters and food processors, while also promoting healthy living.

This is a letter from the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry from Alberta, the Hon. Oneil Carlier. It says:

> The Government of Alberta recognizes the tremendous contributions that the local food sector makes to a strong and diversified economy and to the quality of life of Albertans and Canadians...
>
> I have written a letter to Chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food expressing my support for your bill. I look forward to further opportunities for provincial and federal governments to work together to support our local food producers and processors, and recognize the contributions that they make to the economy, the environment, and the health and wellbeing of all Canadians.

From Manitoba, the Minister of Agriculture Ralph Eichler writes:

> This letter is to express Manitoba Agriculture's support for your Private Member's Bill, C-28: An Act to Establish a National Local Food Day, which would designate the Friday before Thanksgiving each year as “National Local Food Day”....
>
> Having a national designated day to focus awareness of food produced in Canada, especially at a time of giving thanks, is an excellent way to celebrate food and recognize the hard work that goes into its production.

From across Canada, other supporters include the Canadian Horticultural Council, the Canadian Agri-Food Policy Institute, the Canadian Produce Marketing Association, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Association of Fairs and Exhibitions, the Chicken Farmers of Canada, the Canadian Meat Council, the Egg Farmers of Canada, the Turkey Farmers of Canada, Restaurants Canada, food action coalitions, farmers markets, and the list goes on.

There are a number of food events across Canada. We encourage every riding, every province, to celebrate food locally as well. I will list some that are currently occurring in Canada. The national local food day complements the many local and regional farmers markets and food festivals that already take place across Canada. There are many organizations that promote Canada's culinary wealth, including World Food Day on October 16, National Food Day, Feast of Fields, the Nelson Garden Festival, Taste of the Danforth, the Shediac Lobster Festival and many more. Canadians love locally produced food and we are proud of the world-class excellence of our products. We need more opportunities to celebrate local food.

I know that each member of the House is proud of the growers, producers and harvesters in their particular part of the country. In order to help shine a light on their important contributions to food security, a healthy environment and a healthy economy, I ask that members continue their support for Bill C-281 and let it move on to the Senate. Let us join together across Canada and recognize the Friday before Thanksgiving each year as national local food day.

I very much appreciate all the support that we have had to date, and I look forward to that support continuing.

● (1740)

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member for what he is trying to do and what he is trying to submit.

The question is, how much of a capacity do we have in Canada, and specifically in British Columbia and on the Prairies, to be able to produce enough food for Canadians? If we were to take that calculation, if he has done the math, would he be able to advise us on Canada's capacity in terms of locally produced food?

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Mr. Speaker, I have not actually done the calculations. I just know that across Canada, as local food grows in importance, we are going to get better and better at ensuring food security for the future.

I will give an example. When I was mayor of Cranbrook, we started to have a look at what kind of opportunity there was to use our vacant lots in communities. Virtually every city has lots that are currently empty. We could, instead, turn those into gardens to help grow local food.

When I was in Korea, again when I was mayor and we had a friendly city relationship, we stayed at a hotel in downtown Wonju, South Korea. What was once a vacant city block was entirely covered in vegetable gardens.

We can certainly do much better to ensure that we have food locally, and of course if we have extra, we are always happy to export it.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the hon. member's efforts in this regard. This would recognize farmers and producers for what they do, not only for their own local areas but for the economy generally.

I have always found it strange that often we will be producing food in one area of the country and they will be producing it in another. Two trucks will be passing each other on the road, going in different directions, because of the brand that is on the label, so that one of the chain stores can sell that particular product. I know of situations where people could not buy Nova Scotia corn in Nova Scotia, because the chain stores had a contract to bring in Ontario corn. What sense does that make?

This would not only recognize farmers but also, if we could have people buy local more often, actually lessen the trucking and help the environment. It would do any number of other things. It would recognize farmers locally for what they do. It would show people in the local area the quality of products they can get from their local farmers, and that is all to the better.

I really appreciate and want to congratulate the member on his efforts.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Mr. Speaker, the member brings up an excellent point.

Again, when I was mayor of Cranbrook, I met with the president of Save-On-Foods, which is a B.C. company that is in many of our communities. I asked him that question. I asked, "If we end up developing a greenhouse operation in Cranbrook and producing vegetables, would you buy them locally?" He said, "Absolutely, that is the preferred way to do it." They save money doing it that way. It cuts down on environmental costs, but also on actual costs for companies if they get products grown locally.

The more we can grow locally, the better it is. We need to have industries or stores that are leaders in their area to do that.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member for Malpeque almost stole my question, but I will ask it anyway.

I heard a story that might be apocryphal, but in Spain and France there were two trucks that actually had a head-on collision. One was bringing tomatoes from France into Spain, and the other was bringing tomatoes from Spain into France. It shows the absurdity of the situation.

I would like to ask the member for his comments on this very unusual situation.

● (1745)

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Mr. Speaker, that is an unfortunate situation in many aspects, of course.

Again, if we can grow more food locally, most stores would be happy to carry that food and sell it locally. It would save on transportation costs. It would save the stores money, it would help the environment, and we also would not have situations like that happening, which was unfortunate for the people involved as well as in terms of the concept.

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the House for the opportunity to talk about this important private member's bill.

I want to comment on the last question. I can assure the member that my tomatoes will never collide with anyone else's, because I sell them locally.

On that note, I applaud the member for Kootenay—Columbia for introducing this excellent private member's bill. I was proud as chair of the standing committee on agriculture that all members of our committee gave the bill unanimous support when it was presented last June.

Our government recognizes the contribution of agriculture and food to local and regional economies. We also recognize the importance of strengthening connections between consumers and producers of food, and the capacity of local food systems to offer distinctive, high-quality food choices to consumers.

This debate has prompted some members to share their experiences with local food.

[*Translation*]

I have been a local farmer all my life, but things have changed a lot since I started out. Back then, there were plenty of small and medium grocery stores, wholesalers and farmers' markets where I could take my certified organic tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and flowers. However, the concentration of the food chains has changed the landscape for my business and that of my fellow farmers.

[*English*]

It forced me and others to connect more directly with the consumer. Through my direct market called Mr. Tomato in Rogersville, New Brunswick, we were able to connect directly with consumers. They came to our place to buy our product.

I was a founding member of the Really Local Harvest co-op. This co-op has about 30 members within a 100 kilometre area. It permits us to network and to sell our products. With that co-op, we became the manager of the Dieppe Farmers Market, where over 7,000 people go every Saturday to buy their food and talk to farmers. It made a big difference. That market managed to keep some farmers going when a lot of farms were closing down, and it permitted our farms to stay connected with the consumer.

Food is close to our hearts. Home is where the heart is.

[*Translation*]

From U-pick strawberries in Ontario to fresh beer made with prairie hops to drink on the balcony, our favourite foods are often those produced closest to home. In fact, according to the 2018 Canadian Food Trends published by the Loblaw Food Council, more and more Canadians want locally produced food. Of course, we are all local somewhere.

That means that we need a solid agricultural system across Canada. All Canadians can share their beloved local foods with the entire planet to help feed the growing world population with sustainable foods.

That is why the objective of the new Canadian agricultural partnership is to build a strong agriculture sector. The Canadian agricultural partnership is Canada's five-year agriculture policy framework. It outlines a bold new vision that will help the agriculture and agrifood sector innovate, grow and prosper.

On April 1, ministers of agriculture from across Canada launched the partnership as a shared vision for the future of Canadian agriculture. Over the next five years, our governments will invest $3 billion in the partnership. Over $1 billion of that investment will support federal programs and activities to revitalize Canadian agriculture. These programs will focus on the following three key areas: growing trade and expanding markets; innovation and sustainable growth of the sector; and supporting diversity and a dynamic, evolving sector.

Canadians want to make informed choices about what they eat. They want to be able to trust the quality of the food that they and their families are eating. The Canadian agricultural partnership is the first policy framework to explicitly recognize public trust as a priority for our agriculture sector.

● (1750)

The new $74-million AgriInsurance program will help the agriculture sector maintain and strengthen public trust in Canada's food system.

[*English*]

It will help farmers and food producers tell customers about the great things they are doing to grow safe, high-quality food and to care for animals and safeguard our environment, so that customers, whether they be local or international, will know that the red maple leaf is a symbol they can trust. Our new $20-million agri-competitiveness program will also help organizations raise awareness of our world-class agricultural industry among Canadians. This will reinforce the public's confidence in Canada's food production system and promote public trust. Partnership programs are also breaking new ground with a strong focus on diversity.

The more perspectives we have in agriculture, the more dynamic the sector becomes. Through our new $5-million agri-diversity program, we will reach out to women, indigenous communities and young people. It is important that we remove any barriers that are preventing these groups from taking up a leadership role in the sector. This diversity helps give local food systems the capacity to offer distinctive, high-quality food choices to consumers.

Of course, when it comes to agriculture, we are a trading nation, and the partnership is geared to opening markets. We export over half of all of our agricultural output and the government knows that trade also drives jobs and the economy.

[*Translation*]

That is why our objective is to expand agricultural exports to $75 billion by 2025.

The partnership programs will help the sector promote Canada as a producer of safe, high-quality foods so that our farmers and food processors can sell more products at home and abroad. This will help strengthen the local food movement and could even draw food tourists from around the world.

The future of Canadian agriculture is bright. We are blessed with an abundance of quality farmland and a variety of local climates. Our ice wines are among the best in the world.

[*English*]

That is why we have set a target of $75 billion in agricultural exports by 2025.

For top-quality grains, look no further than the Prairies. In fact, a public-private group in Saskatchewan was selected as one of five new super clusters under our $950-million investment in budget 2018.

[*Translation*]

I am sure we can all agree that eating locally is an excellent way to stimulate the economy.

[*English*]

Protein Industries Canada will turn even more of our prairie grains into high-quality plant protein to feed the world. With the new programs available under the Canadian agricultural partnership, we are giving farmers and food processors the tools they need to keep agriculture diverse and vibrant right across our country. A yearly national local food day would be an opportunity for Canadians to take a look near them and see what is growing.

Once again, I would like to thank the member for Kootenay—Columbia for all of his hard work on this bill.

I look forward to the passing of this bill before the end of this Parliament. I hope it does. We are proud to support it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to speak to Bill C-281, an act to establish a national local food day. I applaud the initiative put forward by my colleague from Kootenay—Columbia, and I would like to take this opportunity to say how important it is for us to honour the women and men who, day after day, put their heart and soul into providing us with healthful food produced close to home.

I am happy to see that Canadians of all generations are interested in knowing where the food they eat comes from. "Field to fork" is a motto we should all make our own. We should make the benefits of local food available to our families. Truly understanding what fuels our bodies begins with knowing what we are eating, where it comes from, and who produces it. Happy are those who cultivate trust-based relationships with farmers, those caring artisans who share their passion and their know-how with us.

By fostering this relationship, we are guaranteeing an abundant harvest and the satisfaction of cooking with quality ingredients. Our local and public markets are a means of taking concrete action to support our local economy and our environment. Maintaining a short route in the food chain will eliminate enormous quantities of greenhouse gases and inspire a new generation of farmers in our local economy.

I am proud to be able to say that, in Lévis—Lotbinière, we promote our local and regional products. I am living proof. By the way, I would like to thank all of the organizations that feature local products from Lévis—Lotbinière on the menu in their activities. Just look at the fruit and vegetable stands on our farms and in the riding. They provide a variety of produce throughout the summer and fall. A real treat! I would like to extend my warmest thanks to the organizations that make it possible.

We need to be aware that, every time we buy local products, we are honouring our craftspeople and investing in our present and future food safety. Here in the House, we can also do more and better by adopting measures to stimulate the local produce initiative, by investing in the innovation of new products and new cultivars of fruits and vegetables that are less vulnerable to the vagaries of the weather and other natural stresses.

We must also remember those who process local foods. I would like to call your attention to the fact that, in my riding, we have been trying to encourage people to eat local for almost 20 years now. I would like to mention an organization that has made an outstanding effort in this respect: Goûtez Lotbinière. The organization has evolved over the years, but it was created in January 2000. The initial objective was to pool knowledge and experience in order to meet the needs of producers and processors in the Lotbinière RCM who wanted to join forces to promote and market local products.

Since then, several other organizations have become involved, including the Lotbinière local development centre, the Lotbinière regional county municipality, the Lotbinière Caisses Desjardins, the Union des producteurs agricoles, the CFDC and Promutuel de Lotbinière.

Year after year, Goûtez Lotbinière has stood out from the rest by coordinating and participating in activities in Lotbinière, including the Fondation Philippe Boucher cocktail reception since 2009, the Balades d'automne and the Saint-Apollinaire festival, among many others.

● (1755)

The Table Goûtez Lotbinière was also in the Quebec City and the Chaudière-Appalaches area. It took part in the New France festival, the old port of Quebec Christmas market, special events on the Quebec-Lévis ferry, and so on.

A growing number of businesses are calling on the organization's services. That is why designating a national local food day just before Thanksgiving is the best time for raising awareness about the importance of agri-food in our lifestyle. This affects our health and our local economy.

These businesses deserve our attention. Let us encourage them by buying their products that are so wonderful. That way, we might discover new burgeoning success stories close to home and be able to proudly say one day that we were there from day one or that we were one of the first to buy these local treasures.

I encourage all farmers and processors to take part in the competition to promote their products.

We are seeing a positive and enthusiastic response from Canadians to all these efforts. I invite all Canadians to draw up a list of their local producers and processors so that they can buy and taste local products and maintain this relationship of trust. They can help keep our regions economically prosperous by buying local.

Before I finish, I also want to talk about a new national and even international trend: rural green tourism. For several years, tourists have been participating in activities and buying products that are directly or indirectly connected to agri-tourism or local tourism.

You can find all kinds of local and foreign visitors using regional agri-tourism maps, visiting agri-tourism museums, or simply stopping at u-pick farms along the way. These rural or agri-tourists are not necessarily trying to promote local foods; they simply enjoy basking in the country life.

On top of those visitors are the ones who choose their tourist destinations based on accommodations, restaurants with good local menus, as well as rural-themed cultural activities, sports or educational experiences that are typical of the local way of life.

In short, this will help our overall health, including our physical health and our environment. This is huge. We owe it to all Canadians to make a choice for our regions' futures, and I urge all of my colleagues to support Bill C-231.

● (1800)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to support my dear colleague's bill to create a national local food day.

The creation of a national local food day is especially important to me because I represent the agri-food technopole of Quebec, where agriculture is truly the economic driver of our region. In the riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, we know how important local agriculture is to both the farmers and the consumers.

A big public demonstration is planned for November 18 in Montreal to support agriculture in my region. The event is being called “Garde-manger en danger” or “our pantry in peril”. I invite all my colleagues to join us and show their support for our farmers who work hard to feed us and ensure that we have good fresh products every day. Farmers are going through a tough time. Now more than ever it is important for us to rally behind them.

Bill C-281 would bring together farmers and consumers around the issue of local consumption. We should show our recognition and support for our local farmers who work hard for all of us. Having this day on the Friday before Thanksgiving would allow us to celebrate together this day of sharing between local farmers and citizens.

Local food is a great way to support farmers by cutting out the middleman and making direct producer-to-consumer transactions possible. Consumers get fresher, traceable seasonal produce. Our constituents care more about the quality of the food on their plate and supporting local farms, and they are tired of excess packaging. Buying local is very good for the planet.

According to the David Suzuki Foundation, eating locally is one of the top 10 things we can do to reduce our global footprint. Nowadays, one farmer can produce enough to feed over 50 families on less land and with less water and fewer resources than before. Local food is the obvious choice.

A Toronto FoodShare study found that a meal made with ingredients from a local farmers' market travels an average of 101 kilometres, whereas an imported meal travels an average of 5,364 kilometres, producing 100 times more greenhouse gas emissions than the meal from the local market. Eating locally also helps reduce the amount of plastic packaging associated with getting products to market. Let us remember that food packaging accounts for 70% of the world's plastic waste.

Producers across Canada and Quebec are subject to standards that protect the taste and quality of all Canadian products. Our quality standards represent a true guarantee for consumers. It is all the more important to fully support our producers now that Canada's borders have been opened to even more imports of American agricultural products. Quebec products meet standards and requirements that are not applied to imported products. Local producers end up at a disadvantage, because imported products can sometimes be cheaper, since they use ingredients that are banned in Quebec. By buying local, consumers can avoid these imported products and support local producers.

Quebec products also offer very clear labelling and traceability. For example, Quebeckers can find out which farm produced the eggs they are buying by going to oeuf.ca and typing in the code printed on the egg's shell.

By instituting a local food day, we can send a strong message to our constituents. This is an excellent way to use legislation to encourage Canadians to support local agriculture. We can also protect family farms and help them move out of the shadow of larger operations. We must all put this day of celebration in our calendars.

● (1805)

A national local food day would raise awareness about how hard it is for too many Canadians to access healthy, affordable food close to home.

I am proud to represent the riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot in this House and to speak for our farmers, who work so hard every day. Today I want to thank each and every one of them for their dedication and their huge contribution to the vitality and economic development of our riding.

Local agriculture is part of our identity, and we are so proud of it. We need to pay tribute to all the farmers across the country who work hard to ensure our food sovereignty and to feed all Canadians.

We need to emphasize the importance of buying local now more than ever, considering the tough times our farmers are going through. I would like to commend the Maskoutains RCM, UPA Montérégie and the Agricultrices de la Montérégie-Est, which represent many farmers in my riding. I want to thank them all for the excellent work they do and for tirelessly defending our farmers' interests. They contribute to the vitality and economic development of Montérégie, the pantry of Quebec.

Eating locally helps us guarantee our food sovereignty, maintain local expertise, revitalize our agricultural land and create jobs in all our regions. We are all affected, directly or indirectly.

The people of Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton Vale keep telling me how important local agriculture is to them and how we need to protect it and acknowledge the farmers who breathe life into my riding and contribute to jobs and youth training.

Bill C-281 would complement Canada's Agriculture Day, which is celebrated in February, by focusing on local agriculture and all the sectors it encompasses, from producers to restaurants to artisans, as well as the riding's economic health and public health.

Food is a necessity. High-quality products are vital for public health. A population that maximizes the benefits of its food is a population in better health.

Bill C-281 is a good way to pay tribute to our local producers and to show our appreciation to all those people working hard in the background to feed us all. They contribute to Canada's success through their commitment and hard work.

Since 2011, the NDP has been promoting a Canadian food strategy that would combine objectives related to health, the environment, food quality and local and organic choices by consumers across the country.

Access to healthy food choices at affordable prices is a priority for the NDP. Meeting these objectives involves the support of our local farmers' markets. I have the honour to represent a riding where the land is fertile and agriculture is very diversified. Every day, residents of Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton Vale are able to meet the farmers that produce their food at the various kiosks at the Saint-Hyacinthe farmers' market on Cascades Street.

I would also like to highlight all of the events organized to support and promote our local food products, such as the Foire agroalimentaire de la région d'Acton and the Matinées gourmandes, which travel to several communities in my riding.

I would also like to thank the restaurants that put local products on their menus, and the grocers who make room on their shelves for local products.

Finally, I would like to thank the head of tourist development at the Saint-Hyacinthe Technopole, who promotes and offers our local products at the tourist information booth in the congress centre. What a great way to showcase the richness and diversity of the greater Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton regions.

There are multiple locations where residents of Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton Vale can find many high-quality local products such as cheese, milk, eggs, and all sorts of seasonal fruits and vegetables.

These locations do our riding proud. Farmers are happy to have such direct connections with consumers, and word of mouth helps them to attract and keep customers.

In closing, I would like to offer my full support to my dear colleague's bill, which seeks to create a national local food day. It is good to celebrate local food both in British Columbia and Quebec.

● (1810)

Mr. Jean Rioux (Saint-Jean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Kootenay—Columbia for introducing this bill to celebrate national local food day.

I think it is a great day in the House any time we have the chance to talk about agriculture and food. Our farmers and food processors work hard every single day to put food on our tables, and they contribute to Canada's sovereignty by ensuring a safe and healthful food supply.

I consider it a privilege to rise today to acknowledge their contribution to our great country. That is why I welcome Bill C-281, which our government is happy to support because the importance of food and farming to the health of our citizens cannot be overstated. Canada has a global reputation as a producer of healthful food.

From gate to plate, the agriculture and agri-food sector generates over $114 billion of our gross domestic product. Canada's agricultural sector is booming, and people are taking notice. The Advisory Council on Economic Growth, chaired by Dominic Barton, has recognized its huge potential. The advisory council pointed to agriculture as one of the key growth sectors of our economy, one that can help unlock a prosperous future for our economy, our middle class and our nation.

Global demand for food is growing at a record pace. It is estimated that farmers will have to produce as much food over the next 45 years as they did over the past 10,000 years. Not only is demand for food growing, it is growing for the kind of top-quality foods that Canada's industry can deliver. That is why our government has set an ambitious target to grow our agri-food exports to at least $75 million by 2025. We are well on our way to hitting that target.

While Canada can play an important role in helping feed the world, there are also new opportunities for producers and processors closer to home. The fuel that is going to power this economic engine is our local farmers and processors. That is why I am pleased to voice our government's support for this bill.

A national local food day would be an opportunity to recognize the contribution of agriculture and food to local economies. It would be an opportunity for Canadians to learn more about how the food they eat makes it to their dinner tables. Most importantly, it is an opportunity to recognize our hardworking farmers and food processors. There is no doubt that more and more Canadians are putting local food on their tables. According to last year's chef survey by Restaurants Canada, eating local is one of the top five trends on Canadian menus.

Many provinces have already introduced initiatives to buy local. These initiatives help showcase local ingredients and capitalize on the explosive growth of culinary tourism. They can help bring together all the players, from farmers to chefs, in order to promote local food and stimulate the economy. They also help boost sales of local products to tourists and local residents, who are better able to identify locally grown foods. These buy local initiatives also contribute to increasing export sales should a region become known as the supplier of choice for certain foods.

When consumers choose to eat local foods, they create specialized markets and local supply chains for small and medium sized farms and businesses. The local food systems can provide distinct food choices that incorporate local flavours. In the riding of Saint-Jean, we can find local products throughout the region. People take joy in buying fresh farm products at the Place du marché in downtown Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

● (1815)

In Sainte-Brigitte, Jardins d'Odina produces excellent ciders. In Saint-Grégoire, known for its orchards, Denis Charbonneau and Léo Boutin produce ice ciders. There are dairy producers in Saint-Alexandre and Saint-Paul-de-l'Île-aux-Noix. Au gré des champs cheese factory has won prizes several times. Au Saucisson vaudois in Sainte-Brigitte, Dalisa in Saint-Jean and Stefan Frick in Lacolle make deli meats that are sought after by consumers.

Les Vignobles des Pins in Sabrevois, Mas des Patriotes in L'Acadie and Vignoble 1292 in Saint-Blaise are the pride of the region for the quality of their wines. In Saint-Valentin, the town of love, Les Fraises Louis Hébert has a u-pick strawberry operation and sells many strawberry-based products.

The government's approach to local food is focused on national efforts to increase consumer awareness and knowledge of the Canadian agricultural sector as well as the needs of farmers' markets across the country. Provincial governments have a role to play in determining what local food means to them, and the Government of Canada continues to work with interested provinces on this issue.

Indeed, many provinces and territories are actively implementing local food strategies. To make them effective, provincial support is needed, combined with a bottom-up structure that understands the local food scene. For a number of years, provinces and territories have been working with the federal government to fund diverse local food programs. Under the previous framework for agriculture, provinces and territories had the flexibility to target investments to meet local needs. That way, they could provide tools to help farmers remain innovative and competitive, and capture new and existing markets, which include, of course, markets for local food.

For instance, in Quebec, $5 million was targeted to developing local markets. The Proximité program encouraged farmers to take advantage of the business opportunities that local markets provide. The Yukon used funding to get a wider variety of farm products into farmers' markets and restaurants and onto store shelves. New Brunswick's market development, product enhancement and diversification program supported farmers' efforts to capture new markets, be they local, national or global.

We are focusing on a new five-year Canadian agricultural partnership. The partnership is a $3-billion federal-provincial-territorial investment, a bold new plan to help keep Canadian agriculture booming. It includes $1 billion in federal funding for six programs and activities that will build an even stronger, more innovative and more sustainable sector, and $2 billion in cost-shared funding between the provinces and territories and the federal government. These funds have built-in flexibility to allow the provinces and territories to target their own programs to local needs. Working in partnership can provide a boost to the local food movement.

Just as farmers have the full support of Canadians, they also have the full support of this government. We are there to encourage and help people from all walks of life to choose farming as their profession. We are there to support them with programs and services under the Canadian agricultural partnership to help them grow their businesses. The government is there to fight for them on the global stage as they help feed a growing world population.

The Government is happy to support Bill C-281 because, when Canadians shop locally, they are keeping dollars in the community, creating jobs and contributing to sustainable development.

● (1820)

When we transport these agricultural products over shorter distances, we reduce the environmental impact. That is the most pleasant way I can think of to boost the economy.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Kootenay—Columbia has up to five minutes for his right of reply.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, clearly, local food inspires. I would like to start by thanking my constituents from Kootenay—Columbia for inspiring me to move Bill C-281, and for building our local food economy. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the House for all of their inspiring speeches. We can see how excited they are about local food in their particular ridings, as they should be.

Why should we support local food? First of all, as we know, it is healthy. We know where it comes from and who is producing it. It is important for the economy. It puts millions of dollars into the local economies and brings tourism to communities. I saw that in the farmers' markets I visited this summer. Of course, it is also important for farm-stay tourism and restaurants. When people travel the country, they look for local food in local restaurants. It is environmentally friendly. It reduces carbon dioxide and the use of plastics. It provides community food security and keeps farmers farming, which we absolutely need to do across Canada. It brings together families and communities. Healthy local agriculture also means a healthy local environment. We need healthy soils and pollinators to make farming and local food work. It leads to protection of water and watersheds, and it protects agricultural land from development.

How can we encourage local food? We can buy locally, support local growers and farmers, and ensure there are healthy local fish and wildlife populations and opportunities to harvest them in rural areas. We can ask our local mayors and councils to make vacant city lots available for agriculture right next door, and look for ways to remove any barriers from farm to fork and encourage all levels of government to focus on local food and local food security. Lastly, we can encourage our senators, locally for people around Canada, to support timely passage of this bill. For people in the House who know people in the Senate, they can talk to their colleagues there to support timely passage of Bill C-281 in the Senate so we can celebrate local food all across Canada on Friday, October 11, 2019, as part of national local food day.

I thank all my colleagues in the House.

● (1825)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

POVERTY

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rose in the House to call on this government to take action to give the 1.2 million children living in poverty an equal opportunity to succeed.

This week the Minister of Families introduced his bill to reduce poverty in Canada and to lift, as he said, 650,000 people out of poverty in this country. The document is only six pages long. The Liberals retained only three points from my bill. It is a government bill, but it does not come with any funding or programs.

There is nothing in the bill for affordable child care across the country. There is nothing to ensure that our seniors and our families have access to the prescription drugs they need. There is nothing to make the guaranteed income supplement automatic for all seniors. There is nothing to provide a dental plan to those who cannot afford one or cannot afford to go to the dentist. There is nothing for social and affordable housing now. There is nothing for the creation of a guaranteed minimum income program. There is nothing for our low-income workers, who sometimes work 50 hours a week and still have to use the food bank. I could go on.

With 1.2 million children under the age of 18, or 20% of our country's children, living in a low-income household, we cannot really say that Canada has made things better for vulnerable children in the past 10 years. Child poverty primarily affects the children of recent immigrants and single-parent families, in addition to first nations.

Nathalie Appleyard, the spokesperson for Campaign 2000, a Canadian coalition of more than 120 anti-poverty organizations, criticized the bill's lack of ambition. She pointed out that even if poverty is reduced by 50% in 2030, 600,000 children will still grow up in poverty. That is a huge number for a country as rich as ours, and this is where it is clear that the government will not eliminate poverty by mailing out cheques, like it does with the Canada child benefit.

At a press conference yesterday, I said that the bill would not lift a child out of poverty. Children who are poor today will still be poor tomorrow. Campaign 2000 added, “this will not provide much comfort to the children who don't have enough to eat right now or who don't know where they will live next month.” Poverty almost always goes hand in hand with food insecurity. Many children from poor families do not have access to the nutritional resources they need.

How can the government think this is acceptable? How can it draft a bill that has no measures and no funding?

We also have to focus on one neglected group in particular: indigenous peoples. They are the most vulnerable of our vulnerable population. In Canada, 38% of indigenous children live in poverty.

Campaign 2000, which represents 120 organizations, proposes solutions for eradicating poverty. I invite my hon. colleague across the way to listen to them. They are calling on the government to increase the Canada child benefit, improve the employment insurance program, and establish a universal child care program.

On behalf of the 120 organizations that Campaign 2000 represents, but especially on behalf of the millions of people living in poverty, I am calling on the government to tell us when it will increase the Canada child benefit, improve the employment insurance program, and establish a universal child care program.

● (1830)

Mr. Steven MacKinnon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. We often talk about other issues that fall under my department, but I am very pleased to be here this evening to address the important issue of poverty.

Since coming to power, our government has been working very hard to reduce poverty in Canada. We have taken tangible initiatives and measures to help the middle class, but of course we are focusing on those who want to join the middle class.

Shortly after coming to power, we also raised taxes for the wealthiest 1% and we used that money to lower taxes for the middle class. To that we added major investments for children, seniors, low-income workers and other vulnerable Canadians. These investments have considerably reduced poverty and vastly improved people's lives.

[*English*]

To date, our government has invested $22 billion toward eradicating poverty for all Canadians. We are making solid progress with programs like the Canada child benefit, more generous benefits for seniors, early learning and child care, and housing, investments, I will note, that were, unfortunately, all opposed by our friends in the New Democratic Party. By 2019, these investments will have helped lift more than 650,000 Canadians out of poverty.

[*Translation*]

This week, we kept one of our promises by introducing Bill C-87, an act respecting the reduction of poverty. It is an integral part of Canada's first poverty reduction strategy as announced by my colleague, the minister, this past summer. This bill will implement three key elements that demonstrate our government's commitment to being a global leader and a progressive partner in the fight against poverty.

[*English*]

We are going to establish concrete poverty reduction targets that will help Canada achieve its lowest levels of poverty in history within a decade. We are going to establish Canada's first-ever official poverty line so that the fight against poverty can be guided by statistics and data instead of partisan ideology, and we are going to appoint a national advisory council on poverty through our open, transparent and merit-based appointments process to ensure that people with lived experience have a voice in the decision-making process. The council will also provide annual reports telling the government and Canadians how we are progressing. These are critical tools, because our government understands that poverty is a complex issue requiring a multi-faceted approach.

[*Translation*]

We recognize that other levels of government have an essential role to play. Working with them is crucial. I am sure the progressive measures that bring all the activities and all the players in my party together will rally those concerned about poverty in Canada and produce tangible results.

● (1835)

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities conducted a lengthy study of poverty and published its report. We have the government's response to this report, but the bill on poverty, introduced this week, does not even go as far as the government's response.

Yes, it mentions targets, a metric and an advisory council, but there is no definition. Do members know that in Canada we do not have an official definition of poverty? We do not know what we are talking about.

There is also nothing about research so we can tackle the causes of poverty. Researchers informed us of that and we need to do research. Yes, there is talk of partnerships, but the importance of working together is not in the bill on poverty. All groups from across Canada told the committee that cities, provinces, territories, indigenous peoples and the federal government must work together.

To conclude, I will say that words are no longer enough. People living in poverty need concrete action.

Mr. Steven MacKinnon: Mr. Speaker, we know that we need to bring together all of the players and stakeholders in Canadian society to wage this never-ending battle against poverty.

However, my opinion differs from that of my colleague. We have taken real and meaningful action and invested real money, which will do more to reduce poverty than has ever been done before in Canadian history.

The Canada child benefit helps our families every day. The enhanced guaranteed income supplement helps seniors every day, and the working income tax benefit helps people break down the welfare wall and get back to work.

We have made real efforts to reduce poverty, and we will continue to do so.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: A motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted pursuant to an order made on Friday, September 21. This House stands adjourned until Monday, November 19, at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:37 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Thursday, November 8, 2018

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

ORAL QUESTIONS