



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 148 • NUMBER 386 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, February 25, 2019

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, February 25, 2019

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayer

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

The House resumed from December 11, 2018, consideration of the motion.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Motion No. 206, which New Democrats will oppose even though we feel there is an urgent need to encourage Canadians to be more physically active and less sedentary.

The Liberals are doing the same thing here that they did with pharmacare. They want to study an issue that is already very well documented instead of taking steps that will really make a difference for people. If the sponsor of the motion had done his homework, he would have learned that the points he raised in his motion were already addressed in a joint report by federal, provincial and territorial ministers on May 31, 2018. Instead of duplicating a report that is barely 10 months old, the member should be pushing his government to act on the 46 recommendations in that report immediately.

The riding of Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot is lucky to have extraordinary people who help our children learn and grow through sport. Dedicated volunteers spend countless hours nurturing our kids' love of sport and helping them excel.

People in my riding are passionate. Some have been involved in the sporting community for so long that they have inspired generations of locals. One person in particular, Louis Graveline, has devoted the past 50 years to judo students in Saint-Hyacinthe. What an honour it is to talk about Mr. Graveline in the House. Imagine spending 50 years sharing one's passion with several generations of students. That is quite an achievement. Former students describe him as passionate, persistent, firm and caring.

Another individual who comes to mind is Normand Ménard, from our athletic club, who has influenced generations of children who are now adults. Mr. Ménard has run the equivalent of the distance

around the earth three times. Speaking of running, for 25 years now, Saint-Hyacinthe has been hosting the Défi Gérard-Côté, an event that brings together runners of all ages and all skill levels. It is a fun, not-to-be-missed event in Saint-Hyacinthe, with various categories including school, family, individual and corporate teams.

Acton Vale has had its own event for runners of all ages, the Défi des semelles d'Acton Vale, for six years now. Acton Vale has also been thrilled with the success of its baseball team, the Castors d'Acton Vale. I must acknowledge Michel Dorais for his volunteer work with the team, as well as the Fonds d'athlète de la MRC d'Acton, which supports the work of these exceptional athletes every year.

I could go on and on naming many other cheerleaders, everyone from the ProCheer club to André Cournoyer and Vincent Cournoyer from the Défi Futsal, as well as our two figure skating clubs, one in Acton Vale and one in Saint-Hyacinthe. For swimming fans, I would be remiss if I did not mention the Corporation aquatique maskoutaine and the remarkable athletes in both our swimming club and synchronized swimming club.

In both Acton Vale and Saint-Hyacinthe, we have the privilege of counting on volunteers who dedicate their time to our young people, getting them excited about our national sport, hockey. I am proud to announce to all my colleagues that Saint-Hyacinthe will host the Telus Cup in April 2020. This major sporting event is an opportunity for hockey players from the best teams in the country to show off their talent in a very competitive tournament.

We have some excellent hockey teams in Acton Vale and Saint-Hyacinthe, and I want to commend the volunteer boards of directors and coaches of these teams for their hard work. To name just a few, there is Lucien Beaugard, from the Saint-Hyacinthe pee-wee hockey tournament; Francis Morin, from the Saint-Hyacinthe minor hockey association; Christiane Lussier, Sylvie Carbonneau and the Festi-MAHG board of directors; the Acton Vale minor hockey association; DEK Hockey Saint-Hyacinthe; the Acton Vale provincial midget tournament; the Saint-Hyacinthe Gaulois team; and Noémie Marin, from Acton Vale, who was appointed head coach of the women's team that will represent Quebec at the 2019 Canada Games.

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Did members know that a woman from my region was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame? Danielle Goyette, from Saint-Nazaire, was inducted in 2017. This was an honour for all of Quebec, since she was the first woman from Quebec and the fourth woman to be inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame. The people of Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton Vale are talented, and they win medals everywhere they go.

Today, I am proud to tell members about the accomplishments of the high-performance athletes in my riding who are doing Quebec and Canada proud. Julien Pinsonneault from Saint-Hyacinthe is the Canadian snowshoe champion, and Béatrice Boucher from Saint-Dominique continues to impress the equestrian world. At last year's North American championships, this young woman was the top Canadian rider in dressage and won three medals. She also won the gold medal in the young riders division team event.

There is also Annie Moniqui from the La machine rouge weightlifting club, as well as the entire Darsigny family, which includes Olympian Yvan Darsigny and future Olympians Tali, Matt and Shad Darsigny. The club always wins all the medals in international competitions.

I am also thinking of Francis Charbonneau, the mixed martial arts champion, Jean-Sébastien Roy, the Canadian motocross champion who was inducted into the Canadian Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 2012, and sensei Guy Brodeur of the Guy Brodeur martial arts centre. In 1985, he became world karate champion, winning not one, but two medals. Mr. Brodeur was a pioneer in this discipline and has been passing on his love of karate to young people ever since.

Throughout their school years, kids can also count on experienced coaches to teach and guide them through their development. I am thinking about school clubs like the Patriotes at Saint-Joseph secondary school in Saint-Hyacinthe, the Drakkar at Hyacinthe-Delorme secondary school, the Titans at Robert-Ouimet secondary school, and the badminton club at Robert-Ouimet secondary school.

We are also fortunate to have organizations that look after the well-being of our young people. I am thinking about Jeunes en santé, an organization that promotes a healthy and active lifestyle and healthy living habits for children from infancy to age 17. I want to take a moment to recognize the new coordinator, Jézabel Legendre, who is taking over for Véronique Laramée, who worked with our young people for 15 years. I thank Véronique for her work and I welcome Ms. Legendre.

We can also rely on recreational facilities and those who run them. In every neighbourhood in Saint-Hyacinthe, every town and municipality in my riding, recreation coordinators, most of whom are women, work to keep our young people active all year long, especially through the various day camps that are run throughout the summer.

I am proud to represent these high-level athletes and these volunteers who are dedicated to sharing their passion and love of sport with these athletes. Congratulations to all of them. They are an inspiration to us all.

Our communities did not wait for a motion. We took matters into our own hands and got our kids moving.

Provinces and territories have been making all kinds of healthy living commitments for decades. Whether at the municipal, provincial or territorial level, communities want to get kids moving. All they are waiting for is support from the federal government. This support was well documented in a report from just 10 months ago. The report made 46 recommendations for the federal government to implement immediately. The time has passed for studying the importance of a healthy lifestyle and the importance of moving. Now it is time for action.

For all these reasons, we will be voting against the motion. We believe it is time for action.

● (1110)

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak to a motion that I believe will touch all Canadians' lives in a positive way. With Motion No. 206, the member for Newmarket—Aurora has been a tremendous champion and advocate for active living through the example of his family, his wife and his kids, and how they participate. Motion No. 206 would lift up the many athletes and those achieving new goals in physical activity in his community, roll that out and study how that can have such a tremendous effect on all Canadians.

I think back to some of the commercials from our past that are decades old, where Participation commercials had a 72-year-old Swede as compared to the 40-year-old Canadian. They were at the same level of health, but the Swede was doing more active things and it showed in less disease and a better quality of life. This is what Motion No. 206 is all about. It is about closing that gap in a very comprehensive way, as the member has put forward, not just about physical activity but the enumerable benefits that come through physical activity, socially and emotionally.

Many people who pick up a sport or try an activity like walking or jogging, riding a bike or swimming say that it lifts their self-esteem. Somebody being able to walk around the block the first day and then walk around two blocks a week or two later feels that sense of accomplishment in the goal they have reached.

That is why the Government of Canada is so supportive of Motion No. 206. It instructs the House Standing Committee on Health to study fitness and physical activity levels in youth in Canada. The study would provide an opportunity to examine the complex factors and conditions that influence youth participation in physical activity.

There is a vast majority of Canadians who do not get enough physical activity today. At least eight out of 10 adults and six out of 10 children and youth do not meet the recommended guidelines for physical activity. Simply put, Canadians need to move more and sit less.

As they grow up, Canadian youth participate less in sport, especially girls. While 79% of boys and 70% of girls participate in sport in adolescence, girls tend to drop out of sport at a much higher rate than boys do. Moreover, if a girl has not yet participated in sport by the age of 10, there is only a 10% chance that she will be physically active later on as an adult. Understanding the reasons behind these trends is key to reversing them and in turn closing that gap.

The proposed study will be an opportunity to hear a range of perspectives regarding this important issue, including the steps that the Government of Canada and its partners have taken to increase physical activity.

For instance, the Public Health Agency of Canada, through its community-based initiatives, aims to increase physical activity among youth and families in partnership with the non-governmental sector, the private sector and others. The Public Health Agency of Canada has invested \$112 million and leveraged an additional \$92 million, which is just terrific, from its amazing partners to support projects and address the common risk factors, including physical inactivity associated with major chronic diseases. We know we are at an epidemic with diabetes.

Some of these projects target children and youth, for example, the APPLE Schools Foundation is leading an initiative called “Transforming Healthy School Communities” to improve health behaviours among children and youth in the school environment.

Another project, Sharing Dance, led by the National Ballet School of Canada, provides creative dance opportunities for youth to get active. Alongside these projects, the Public Health Agency of Canada has supported efforts to increase physical activity through programming that addresses healthy weights and mental health.

Mental health is so important when it comes to physical activity. It is shown that if someone participates in physical activity, there are not only the health attributes of being physical, but also the social and mental benefits. When we say mental, it leads to less bullying.

• (1115)

Getting back to self-esteem, someone having higher self-esteem would give that person the ability to shelter themselves from bullying by others who may be sending negative signals, when participating in sport is for the most part about being a positive individual.

In addition, budget 2018 announced new investments in support of increased physical activity among Canadians. The government provided \$25 million in more funding over five years to Participaction, which I just spoke about. We are already seeing progress with this funding. A few weeks ago, Participaction launched an app that can help Canadians, young and old, track their activity levels and encourage them to be more physically active. I encourage everybody to get this app. It is based on leading-edge technology, delivering tailored content to Canadians based on their needs and interests.

In addition, members may have seen billboards and other creative media promoting Participaction's evidence-based prompts to help Canadians move more and sit less. As the Participaction campaign

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notes, everything is better when someone is active. I can attest to that.

Budget 2018 also announced \$47.5 million over five years, and \$9.5 million per year ongoing, to expand the use of sport for social development in more than 300 indigenous communities. Not only will this funding support increased physical activity, it recognizes the important connections between physical activity and other dimensions of our lives, such as mental well-being, social connection and academics. I have been a part of a program called running and reading, which has shown that if students go out for a run or do some physical activity before they do a test, read or immerse themselves in academia, they do much better. It is conclusive. We know it works. Again, this will have immeasurable types of impacts on our society, Canadians, as well as our youth, right through to adulthood and into their senior years.

Supporting Motion No. 206 will provide an opportunity to learn about how we can all work together on this important issue.

No one organization or sector can work in isolation to tackle the problem of physical inactivity in this country. It is why the federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for sport, physical activity and recreation together released a policy framework to increase physical activity and reduce sedentary living in Canada. The framework is appropriately named “A Common Vision for increasing physical activity and reducing sedentary living in Canada: Let's Get Moving”.

The framework represents considerable collaboration by federal, provincial and territorial health officials, the non-governmental sector and indigenous organizations to identify areas of common interest and action. It identifies a number of areas for focus, such as cultural norms, spaces and places, and leadership and learning. These areas of focus can help guide our collective action over the coming years.

I know that the member for Newmarket—Aurora has been passionate about this. He has promoted this in his community. He has brought this forward to the House of Commons as Motion No. 206, so we can look at how we can now deliver the vision he has had for so long to the rest of Canada from coast to coast to coast.

Everyone has a role to play. Communities, academia, the charitable and not-for-profit sector and the private sector must find ways to work together if we are to be successful in getting Canadians to move more and sit less.

An example of the importance of evidence is the “Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines” produced by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, with support by the Public Health Agency of Canada. The guidelines are currently available for children aged zero to four and children and youth aged five to 17, and were produced using the latest scientific evidence. These guidelines have adopted a novel approach, which results in the integration of physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep. In other words, they place physical activity and sedentary living in the context of our daily lives.

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In conclusion, the government is supportive of this study. It would provide an opportunity to learn from the many important investments, initiatives and undertakings that have been made by the Government of Canada and its many valuable partners, which have been working together to increase physical activity. Most importantly, this study would focus increased attention on an issue that is most important to the well-being of all Canadians.

I commend the member for Newmarket—Aurora and thank him. We wholeheartedly support Motion No. 206.

• (1120)

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to speak in support of Motion No. 206. This motion would go a long way towards helping Canadian families, and especially our youth, with being active through participation in sport and other physical activities.

I would also like to thank my colleague, the member for Simcoe—Grey, for her hard work on dealing with the issue of sport. In particular, her private member's bill looking at tax credits would further assist in getting Canadians active in today's world. As the deputy shadow minister for youth, sport and accessibility, it was my pleasure to see not only the member's private member's bill on a tax credit being introduced into the House of Commons, but also this motion focusing on physical activity, which I support. Sport enhances many health issues, such as obesity, diabetes, joint mobility, pain, arthritis and more. It also positively affects physiology, fitness, goal setting, team work, dedication, positive self-esteem, friendships, psychomotor skills as well as new interests.

Statistics show that obesity is set to affect over 30% of the Canadian population by 2030. That is a very troubling number. Not only is obesity itself an issue, but we must also consider the negative health effects that obesity can cause. Diseases such as type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure can seriously affect a person's quality of life. The treatment of these diseases, which are widely preventable through diet and exercise, also puts an increased burden on our health care system and in turn the taxpayer.

Before becoming a member of Parliament, I was a chiropractor. During my practice, I saw first-hand the negative ways that obesity can impact the human body, causing issues like cardiovascular problems, fatigue, joint pain and sometimes limited mobility, not to mention the huge impact on self-esteem. It is clear that something needs to be done to incentivize Canadians, particularly young Canadians, to keep healthy and active in order to avoid potential future problems. This motion would help to do just that, as it did in its previous iteration.

Participation in sporting activities is a major challenge for families, who are living day to day and paycheque to paycheque, attempting to keep their children active and fit. A small tax break, such as was suggested by the member for Simcoe—Grey, would be a helping hand and perhaps impetus to get involved. Not everyone can benefit from the kindness of others, a family member or philanthropic endeavour to help pay to include their children in sport.

In Saskatchewan, we have an organization called "Sask Sport", which helps families. I had the pleasure within my community to assist some families who needed help through one aspect of the

program, KidSport. The assistance comes through many means. KidSport is one program. Others are Dream Brokers, Children in Sport, the aboriginal sport development program, Parasport, long-term athlete development program and Sport for Life.

These programs focus on the concept that no kids should be left on the sidelines and that all should be given the opportunity to experience the positive benefits of organized sport. They involve children and youth, those attending elementary schools, with fundamental skills-development programs, as well as focusing on increasing participation by first nations and Métis communities. The assistance spans from the community level to high-performance levels. They help to build and create active and healthy communities through these programs by enabling non-profit sporting organizations to deliver quality sustainable programs, services and events.

We know that the original children's fitness tax credit worked. Introduced in December 2006 and implemented in January 2007, according to the Department of Finance, 1.8 million Canadian families claimed the credit in 2014, which is 43% of all families with children. This is something that we want to encourage to get more people involved and more active in sporting activities. I believe that Motion No. 206 would assist in that manner.

My colleagues on all sides of the House are able to attest to the expenses that come with putting their children in sports. My wife and I raised two sons and a daughter, all of whom were involved in athletics while growing up. Believe me, it is not cheap. The cost of equipment for Canada's beloved sport alone, hockey, can be in the thousands of dollars, and figure skating can be triple that cost. Many Canadian families do not have that kind of money, so they are left with a choice of whether to put their children in sports knowing the health and various other benefits that has, or whether they pay their bills next month.

• (1125)

We feel that no parent should have to make that kind of choice, and a child fitness tax credit would definitely work to help mitigate that type of situation.

I would like to take a moment to talk about the benefits of child and youth participation in sport and physical activity. The most obvious benefit would be to general physical health.

As I previously stated, many diseases associated with obesity can be prevented with diet and exercise. In 2014, the OECD reported that overweight and obesity rates in Canada were high, with almost 28% of 11- to 15-year-olds being considered overweight or obese. This is troubling, given that the OECD world average at the time was 19%. It is clear, from a physical perspective, that our children and youth are not getting enough activity. Any incentive to improve on that statistic should be pursued and implemented. We know that most times healthy children grow into healthy adults, and it is up to all levels of government to assist in the pursuit of the physical health of Canadians.

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Participation in physical activity is also hugely beneficial for the brain and mental health. In 2018, the Participation report card on physical activity for children and youth focused on this, outlining the connection between physical health and brain health. It stated that there are numerous benefits of physical activity for the brain, such as increased focus and attention span, better performance in academic settings due to increased memory, lower levels of depression and anxiety and much more. In this day and age, when more children than ever are spending increasing amounts of time looking at screens, we need to ensure that every option to participate in physical activity is given so that the next generation of Canadians can grow into healthy and happy adults.

My own personal experiences have also taught me a lot about how physical activity and participation in sport can positively affect children and youth, and not just on a physical or mental health level. I coached hockey for many years in Saskatchewan. I saw first-hand how many life skills young athletes can pick up by being part of a team or by participating in competitions. These skills included things like leadership, teamwork, co-operation, self-esteem, sociability and more. It was always amazing to see a young player start the season as a shy, introverted person and end it as a confident and more outspoken individual. I am proud to have been able to play some role in that transformation, and today I am proud to be speaking in support of an initiative that will help to build these skills for Canadian children and youth well into the future.

Earlier in my remarks, I mentioned the 2018 Participation scorecard. I would like to go back to that for a moment. Each year, Participation assesses child and youth physical activity in Canada and gives it a letter grade. Unfortunately, the grade given for overall physical activity in 2018 was a dismal D+. That means that only 35% of five- to 17-year-olds are meeting the physical activity recommendation within the “Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines” for children and youth. With obesity being a growing epidemic, paired with increased amounts of screen time for children and youth of all ages, these statistics are very concerning.

Also included in that report is a specific grade given to government for the strategies and investments it has implemented to encourage greater participation in physical activity for Canadian children and youth. The grade given in 2018 was a C+, which shows that there is absolutely room for improvement. We, as legislators, need to pursue all avenues available to us to address issues like childhood inactivity, which includes supporting initiatives such as this.

We know that Canadian families deserve support from their government, particularly when it comes to keeping money in their pockets. The fact that 43% of all Canadian families with children utilized the original children's fitness tax credit proves that there is a need for government assistance in this specific area. I am confident that any type of financial assistance or initiative would be great in helping to motivate people to increase their level of activity.

I am also extremely pleased and happy to see the inclusion of disabilities in these motions.

As I stated before, we know, and research shows, that healthy children become healthy adults. By instilling good habits and practices, such as regular physical activity for our children and

youth, we are helping to grow a healthier, happier and more productive Canada. That is something I believe all members of this House can get behind.

• (1130)

Mr. Kyle Peterson (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as always, it is an honour and a privilege to speak in the chamber. Today I am especially honoured to have brought this motion to the House.

First, I want to thank all hon. members who spoke in support of the motion. I thank the member for Winnipeg Centre, the member for Brampton South and the member for Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, all of whom spoke at first reading. Today we heard from the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville, who is a former Olympian, and the member for Souris—Moose Mountain. I thank these members for their support. I am glad that they share my concern about the importance of this motion.

I know my time is limited, but I also want to thank all the organizations and individuals who reached out to me during this process. I thank them for sharing their expertise with me, and I thank them for their commitment and passion regarding the important goal of improving the health of children. After all, I think we can all agree that an active child is a healthy child. Organizations like Activate Aurora, the Nova Scotia Fitness Association, Active For Life, Participation and Sport Matters all provided invaluable input.

I also want to thank Lisa Bowes, now a children's author, who writes books about a girl named Lucy who tries different sports. She gave me some invaluable advice, and I appreciate her commitment to this. Ted Jarvis and Glenn Young also reached out with their input.

All these people are experts in this field, and they all agree that the federal government needs to play a role for us to reach our goal.

It is obviously important for the House to pass this motion. Everyone agrees that physical activity levels are not where they ought to be. The benefits of children being active are indisputable. In fact, our understanding of the health benefits continues to grow and expand, especially the mental health benefits. They are as integral a part of being a healthy child as the physical component.

Much work has been done in this regard. The government's common vision contains many great recommendations. However, this is not enough to get where we need to be. The 2018 Participation report card shows the areas in which we are failing our children. Only 35% of children aged five to 17 are meeting movement guidelines. This is unacceptable. We are not doing our job.

There is also much research regarding physical literacy and the harm that comes from too much screen time. The social benefits of having an active child continue to grow. All this work needs to be harnessed and mobilized by the health committee, which can then make prescriptive recommendations to the government.

Business of Supply

I have two young boys, Kolton and Kash. I am also the son of a phys. ed. teacher, who unfortunately passed away months before I became an MP. He always encouraged me to be physically active, to try new sports, to play outside and to have fun with my friends.

I want my children and all Canadian children to be as active as possible. I want them all to have the same concept that physical play and physical activity is good and ought to be pursued.

The children growing up today face a very different childhood than I had. Social media was not a factor. Bullying was not as rampant. Screen time was not the threat to the well-being of our children it is today.

We need to harness the research out there. We need to make sure that the federal government plays the role it ought to play. I believe that the federal government has a significant role to play in ensuring that all Canadian children are physically active and that all Canadian children have the opportunity to play outside, to play with their friends and to play with teams to foster the formative skills that develop when they are pursuing these physical activities.

It would be unfair if all Canadian children did not have the same opportunities in this respect. That is why I think it is important that the federal government step up and continue to perform its role. Active kids are healthy kids. I urge all members to support this motion.

• (1135)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): In my opinion, the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, February 27, 2019, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

The House is suspended to the call of the Chair.

SITTING SUSPENDED

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 11:39 a.m.)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 12 o'clock)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1200)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC) moved:

That, given the Prime Minister's comments of Wednesday, February 20, 2019, that the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights is the appropriate place for Canadians to get answers on the SNC-Lavalin affair, and given his alleged direct involvement in a sustained effort to influence SNC-Lavalin's criminal prosecution, the House order the Prime Minister to appear, testify and answer questions at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, under oath, for a televised two-hour meeting, before Friday, March 15, 2019.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Milton.

[*Translation*]

The SNC-Lavalin case has caught the attention of Canadians across the country for one very simple reason: it goes to the very heart of what makes Canada a fair and democratic country. As I have already said in the House, we are a nation that is founded on the rule of law. No one should be given special treatment, regardless of their status, wealth or political connections.

[*English*]

Quite simply, what we have seen unfold over the last two weeks is a textbook case of corporate and government corruption, a story in which a corporate giant with deep pockets and deeper government connections tried to leverage its backroom influence to avoid a criminal conviction and in which those in the Prime Minister's Office it leaned on were all too willing to help.

We now know exactly what happened. Privy Council clerk Michael Wernick's testimony last week at the justice committee shone a whole new light on the entire affair. We know that SNC-Lavalin successfully lobbied to have a special provision written into the Criminal Code that would allow it to escape a criminal conviction on bribery charges.

[*Translation*]

We know that the director of public prosecutions independently decided not to make use of that provision. We know that the former attorney general told her superiors in the Privy Council Office and the PMO that she would not use her authority to overrule that decision.

[*English*]

Thanks to Mr. Wernick's testimony, we now know what happened after that: an unsolicited, coordinated and sustained effort by the Prime Minister himself to get the former attorney general to change her mind, to overrule the independent Crown prosecutor and to let SNC-Lavalin off the hook anyway.

It was unsolicited. The attorney general did not seek input from the Prime Minister on her decision. Her decision was already made.

Business of Supply

It was coordinated. The Prime Minister dispatched his closest political adviser and his top civil servant to lean on her, impressing on her the “consequences” if she did not give in to their demands.

It was sustained, with multiple attempts to secure a different decision from the attorney general in the weeks and months since her decision had been made.

It all adds up to the Prime Minister improperly, if not illegally, interfering in a criminal prosecution.

Up until now, the Prime Minister has not given Canadians a clear account of his actions. Since the story first broke in *The Globe and Mail* almost three weeks ago, he has changed his version of events multiple times. He smeared the former attorney general's reputation. He blamed everyone, from his own staff to Scott Brison. He even tried to blame Stephen Harper.

Even after Mr. Wernick's testimony, which pulled the curtain back on just how deeply involved the Prime Minister was, he has remained as evasive and elusive as ever. However, he can no longer avoid the fact that he himself was at the centre of an unprecedented attempt to obstruct the course of justice.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

That brings us to my motion today. The time has come for the Prime Minister to be transparent. He must account for his actions. He must answer for what he has done, and he must do so before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

The SNC-Lavalin case was referred to the justice committee. In the beginning, the Liberals on the committee voted against our motion. Two weeks ago, the opposition members proposed a comprehensive list of nine key witnesses to question, including a number of senior staffers from the Prime Minister's Office and the former attorney general's office. Under strict orders from the government, the Liberals on the committee refused to allow any of those witnesses to appear. The cover-up had begun.

[*English*]

However, as public pressure continues to mount, the Liberals are slowly beginning to back down. The former attorney general has been called to appear, which apparently will take place tomorrow morning, and as I said earlier, Mr. Wernick's testimony last week brought clarity to just how high up this matter goes.

Since its abrupt change of heart on the justice committee's work, the government cannot stop singing its praises. Perhaps sensing that a criminal investigation is coming, the government has a new-found confidence in the justice committee's ability to provide Canadians with answers on this affair.

[*Translation*]

Last Friday, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons said the following in the House: “We have confidence in the members' work on the justice committee. I think they must do their work.”

[*English*]

Those were the government House leader's words.

Last Wednesday, the Prime Minister himself said in this Chamber, “...I have tremendous confidence in the members of the justice committee, who will be moving forward on the investigation on all sides.” We will take him at his word, but I have tabled this motion today because the Prime Minister, and only the Prime Minister, can provide answers to these questions. He has been implicated in this affair, and it is time for him to answer for it.

The Prime Minister promised that he would be different when he was asking Canadians for their votes. He said so right on the pages of the Liberals' campaign platform in 2015. Although Liberal members may not want to hear it now, I will remind them that their own campaign document said, “As the saying goes, sunlight is the world's best disinfectant. Liberals will shed new light on the government and ensure that it is focused on the people it is meant to serve: Canadians.”

After the election he also said, “Openness and transparency will be our constant companions, and we will work to restore Canadians' trust in their government and in our democracy.”

Canadians may have taken him at his word, but he has taken Canadians for fools with his actions in the last few weeks.

I do not need to tell anyone on this side of the aisle just how badly this affair has harmed their reputation in the eyes of Canadians. Canadians feel betrayed. They are wondering how a Prime Minister who came to power only three years ago, promising to be different, has so quickly gone back to the old Liberal ways and so quickly demonstrated the kind of secrecy and hypocrisy that Liberals have become famous for.

[*Translation*]

However, this motion gives the Prime Minister the opportunity to regain some of the confidence he has lost.

I am asking him to support this motion and to ask his entire Liberal caucus to do so as well.

Canadians deserve answers, and he is the only one who can give them those answers.

[*English*]

I invite all members of the Liberal Party to do the right thing. We know that you are under tremendous pressure from political operatives within your own party who are trying to protect themselves—trying to protect themselves possibly from even facing criminal charges themselves—but you have an opportunity and a responsibility to do the right thing, to stand up for our independent system of justice to prove that no one in Canada gets a special deal just because he or she is rich and powerful. There is one set of rules for every Canadian.

Members of the Liberal Party have the opportunity to do that today, and I invite them to do the right thing.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Before I go to questions and comments, I want to remind hon. members to address other hon. members through the Chair and not directly. For some members who are new at the game and do not understand how it works, I just want to point that out.

Business of Supply

• (1210)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle for his contributions this morning. I want to clarify one point and then ask him a question.

He made some mention of the testimony from the Clerk of the Privy Council at committee last week. What specifically the clerk said was, “At every opportunity, verbally and in writing in December, the Prime Minister made it clear that this was the decision for the Minister of Justice to take.”

First, the committee has commenced a study. Second, the committee has called the former minister of justice and attorney general of Canada. Third, the committee has also said that subsequent to hearing testimony, it will revisit the issue as to whether to call subsequent witnesses, and which ones.

Given that lay of the land and given that the committee is undertaking this important study, I ask the member opposite why he expresses distrust in allowing the committee to simply continue to do its work.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, I do not think I have enough time to explain to the hon. member why we on this side of the House, and indeed Canadians, do not trust the government to become transparent on this issue.

What the Clerk of the Privy Council confirmed last week was explosive. It completely contradicted the line that the Prime Minister had been trying to convince Canadians with for the past few weeks. We are now into the third or fourth week of this affair, and the government still refuses to give simple answers to simple questions.

The Clerk of the Privy Council confirmed that there was a sustained and coordinated effort to get the former attorney general to change her mind. The clerk said that the decision was with the former attorney general. She had already made the decision. She said no. She said no. She was asked to overrule an independent prosecutor in the matter of an independent court proceeding, and she said no.

If the decision was hers to make, I would like to ask the hon. member this: Why did the Prime Minister go to work for the next few months to get her to change her mind?

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in light of what the leader of the opposition said to us about the decision having been made by the director of public prosecutions, and then about subsequent efforts by the Prime Minister, by the clerk and by people in the Prime Minister's Office to change her mind, could this possibly be anything but an attempt to interfere with the independent decision of first the director of public prosecutions and then the former attorney general, who refused to budge?

Does the hon. member see this as improper interference, in violation of the independent role that our Constitution requires the Attorney General to play?

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, that is a very excellent question that speaks to the heart of this matter. We only have to look

at the chronology to determine that something improper and perhaps even illegal was happening.

The top prosecutor, the independent chief legal person who has the ability to make these determinations, ruled in her independent capacity that SNC-Lavalin did not qualify for one of these new special deals that the Liberals had created.

Many meetings took place between that company's lobbyists and government officials, all throughout meetings with the former attorney general in attempting to get her to change her position, which was to let the independent prosecutor continue on with her work.

At a key meeting in late December, the former principal adviser, Gerald Butts, met with the former attorney general and talked about consequences. Perhaps the most telling detail of all was that after she refused to give in to those demands from the Prime Minister's Office, the former attorney general was removed from her post. It is impossible to conclude that this pressure was not intended to get a different outcome, because she lost her job for standing up to those in the PMO who were trying to subvert the course of justice.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Maclean's this weekend had an article that characterized the debate on this issue by saying that since its outset, the SNC-Lavalin issue has been framed as a “he said, she said”, but that more accurately, the messy scandal arising from these allegations has been “he, he, he-said”, while “she” remains silent.

To date, we have had the Clerk of the Privy Council say that there was pressure. Why is it so important for the Prime Minister to go before the committee and explain that the determination of whether there was inappropriate pressure is not his to make?

• (1215)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question as well. Of course, we are all looking forward to tomorrow's testimony. We hope that the former attorney general will be allowed to speak. The Prime Minister still refuses to waive that privilege. The Clerk of the Privy Council indicated that there was no privilege protection for what went on there; we certainly find it interesting that the Prime Minister seems to ignore that.

Honestly, to my colleague, we are past the point where new information could somehow change the direction that this investigation needs to go. We know that sustained pressure was applied. That is inappropriate. That is why the Prime Minister needs to answer for it.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by saying very clearly that it is in the public interest that the Prime Minister be a witness at the justice committee and come clean. It is in the public interest that he say yes to this, and it is in the public interest that our colleagues across the floor vote in favour of this motion that we have put forward today.

Why is it in the public interest?

Business of Supply

I am very proud to sit on the justice committee, and so far we have heard from some witnesses. We have heard from the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, and in that meeting we heard that the minister could not answer any questions because he was bound by solicitor-client privilege. He claimed to be bound by cabinet confidence.

He also espoused numerous opinions here in the House as to whether or not something happened regarding undue pressure, or pressure at all, on the minister. However, what I found most interesting is what the witness, the current Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, did not tell us in committee but rather affirmed later: It was that when the former attorney general went to cabinet to discuss her side of the story, he recused himself from that cabinet meeting because he did not want to hear what she had to say.

If the current Attorney General did not want to hear what the former attorney general wanted to say, there is significant public interest in knowing exactly what kind of pressure was building on the previous attorney general. Otherwise, why would the current Attorney General be afraid or concerned about being in a conflict position or maybe being in a position where he had a positive obligation to do something on behalf of the Office of the Attorney General?

The second witness of note was the Clerk of the Privy Council. The Clerk of the Privy Council allowed us to gather more facts, and more facts than we thought we were actually going to get in one sense. He certainly did not believe that there was solicitor-client privilege at play. He also went beyond talking about what was alleged to have been said and confirmed for us many things that happened in cabinet, which was very helpful.

The Clerk also told us of a series of meetings that had happened, which was very interesting, because it gave us certain dots to diarize in terms of putting together the story. However, I do not think he gave us all the information. The only person who has all the information is the witness who did not make it onto the list of the justice committee, and that is the Prime Minister.

What have we heard from the Prime Minister so far? We have heard only from the Prime Minister in successive press availabilities, wherein his story, as the leader of the opposition pointed out, has changed multiple times. What was interesting about his press conferences as they went on was that we got a little more information. Sometimes solicitor-client privilege applied and sometimes it did not. At the end, he gave minimalistic answers whenever the press wanted to go deeper, understand the issue and get more facts and more context in order to maybe come to a conclusion as to whether or not there was influence, and then he would hide behind and cower under both solicitor-client privilege and sometimes under cabinet confidence.

I will be up front and honest in saying that I do not know whether he actually believed that those two principles were at play when he said those things, because we have seen numerous legal opinions in the press since then. It has been a great time for lawyers in this country, and for social media. There have been numerous legal opinions written with respect to whether solicitor-client privilege applies or even if cabinet confidence applies, which is an important consideration as well.

Today we are also going to hear from a number of witnesses in committee. In the first tranche of meetings, we are going to have a literature review of what the Shawcross principle is. The usefulness of the deferred prosecution agreement will be discussed as well in the second hour, which is very interesting for lawyers who may want to have debates on those matters. However, the reality is that it does not really illuminate the situation in which we find ourselves, which means utilizing the facts to determine whether or not the Shawcross principle was adhered to.

I will make a very bold prediction that in today's questioning of these witnesses, one of them will say that they simply do not have enough facts in order to render a clear decision on whether or not the Shawcross principle had been violated, because we do not have all the facts.

• (1220)

Let us look at the meetings.

On September 4, there was a letter to SNC-Lavalin from the director of public prosecutions saying no. On September 17, the Clerk of the Privy Council tells us that he, the Prime Minister and the former attorney general had a meeting, that they did discuss the SNC-Lavalin matter and, supposedly, the former attorney general indicated that she would not be changing her mind and that she would not be succumbing to the pressure.

How do we know that? The Clerk of the Privy Council told us a story in the justice committee. The Prime Minister has given us bits and bobs of information in press conferences. We have not heard yet from the former attorney general. However, the Prime Minister's testimony is crucial and key in this. There were three people in that meeting. We need to hear from every one of those people in order to ensure we know what happened.

We fast forward to the December 5 meeting that happened between Gerald Butts, the former principal secretary to the Prime Minister, and the former attorney general. Having been honoured to be a former cabinet minister in this place, any meeting like that would have a readout sent back to the Prime Minister. We need to know what was in the readout to the Prime Minister, and only the Prime Minister can tell us that.

On December 6, the Prime Minister sent a letter to SNC-Lavalin and the former attorney general indicating this was all the problem of the attorney general and SNC should speak to her. We need to know what thought process and conversations happened up to the moment when he signed that letter, under his own signature.

There was also a meeting on December 17, again, between the Prime Minister's Office and the staff of the former attorney general. Both would send readouts back to their minister and Prime Minister. We need to know what happened there.

Finally, on December 18, the Clerk of the Privy Council had a telephone call with the former attorney general. There is no question that he gave a readout to the Prime Minister after that, because it seems to have formed the basis of a shuffle that happened no more than 20 days later.

There is another reason this is in the public interest.

Business of Supply

Shareholders of SNC-Lavalin have recently contacted a law firm in Windsor, Ontario. They are concerned about the fact that SNC-Lavalin was given notification by the director of public prosecutions on September 4 that she would not be granting a deferred prosecution agreement. However, it was not until October 10 that SNC-Lavalin disclosed this matter. In that intervening time, between September 4 and October 10, shareholders of SNC-Lavalin were not made aware of the fact that the journey to get a deferred prosecution agreement had ended. Why that matters to us is the following.

Who in the Prime Minister's Office, what cabinet minister, or even did the Prime Minister give assurances to SNC-Lavalin that it would not have to disclose a material fact to its shareholders because they were going to sort it all out? An investigation will be going on there. This is not a political matter. While I respect the ethics office and the justice committee, we are far beyond that. We are now in the world of concerns about whether there is true representation and timely disclosure given by the company on a matter that could possibly take away 15% of its revenues. That is a material fact for shareholders to know.

From September 4 in writing until October 10 in writing, no material disclosure happened by SNC-Lavalin on this point. We will not rest until the Prime Minister appears before the justice committee and tells us the truth. Canadians deserve it, shareholders deserve it and we deserve it as an institution.

• (1225)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I truly believe there was no inappropriate pressure.

Having said that, for six years, whether it was Stephen Harper or the current leader of the Conservative Party, the Conservatives have had one item on their agenda, and that is to personally attack members of this government and take a course that is not in the best interests of Canadians. While this government remains focused—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): Order, please. The acoustics in the chamber are amazing, but I am having a hard time hearing the hon. member for Winnipeg North because of the shouting.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, because the Conservative Party says that it is corruption does not make it corruption. The Conservatives say that about everything related to this government. It is important to recognize that this government continues to operate in the best interests of Canadians, with a focus on jobs and good, solid social programs. That is the reality. We know no inappropriate pressure was put on the former justice minister. We have heard that from numerous sources. It is only the opposition.

The Leader of the Opposition referred to rich, corrupt, powerful corporation. Why will he not tell us what he talked about when he met with that company? He does not want to share that with us. What other members of the Conservative caucus met with SNC-Lavalin also?

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, I agree that no members on this side who met with SNC could promise SNC that they would get the

former attorney general to change her mind, so not worry about reporting it to shareholders.

If the member wants to talk about public interests, the day on which SNC-Lavalin announced it would not get a deferred prosecution agreement, its shares fell 15%. Between September 4 and October 10, I wonder who sold and who did not sell. I wonder who bought and who did not buy.

This is an issue that goes beyond the flapping around of the member on the opposite side. This is a serious matter, it involves serious players, serious people and the Prime Minister owes us an explanation.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Milton for her work with my NDP colleague, the member for Victoria, to try to get to the bottom of this and to get to the truth.

We now know that pressure was applied. The former attorney general would not budge, despite the tremendous pressure that was placed upon her by multiple people and multiple sources.

As a female parliamentarian, it has been impossible not to take note of the sexist undertones that have existed throughout this entire sordid affair. The smear campaign against the former attorney general, with racist and sexist undertones that played out on social media really took us aback. We heard the Clerk of the Privy Council address that, although he went beyond where his comments should have gone. He certainly made note of the fact that we had a social media. I was witness to Liberal trolls pushing this message, discrediting the first indigenous woman cabinet minister and attorney general of our country.

This concerns me. There were cartoons of her being bound, gagged and chained. As a female parliamentarian, I would like to ask the member for Milton to comment on the sexism we have been witnessing throughout this very sordid affair.

Hon. Lisa Raitt: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Essex for her incredibly truthful comments because that is exactly what happened.

What I found interesting was, even though it took him six days to apologize, the Prime Minister apologized for everybody else except himself. The Prime Minister was the one who actually questioned her integrity when he said that he did not know why she resigned and that if she thought something was happening, that it was her responsibility to do something about it. He was shifting the blame.

He never apologized for that. He did not apologize for saying that she was incompetent by alluding to the fact that she did not get her job done. He also did not apologize for alluding to the fact that she was emotional with respect to the matter. These things cut to the quick of female parliamentarians when they want to put forth their issues, when they want to put forth their points of view and not be burdened by what we look like or how we speak or whether we have done something in a fashion that they think is the way to go.

Business of Supply

As well, I believe that was a deliberate attempt to ensure the former attorney general thought twice about coming forward and saying anything. What ended up happening? We have ourselves a problem: two high profile resignations and a mess with the securities in the country.

• (1230)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to some of the matters raised in the motion of the member opposite. I want to commence my statements by two comments, which are simply to underscore the important contributions that have been made to government and the Government of Canada by two very distinct Canadians.

First, the member for Vancouver Granville has served as a minister and attorney general as well as the minister of Veterans Affairs, and has made terrific and incredible contributions. I would reiterate my personal alarm about the comments that were made about the member for Vancouver Granville and the attacks that were made about her and her character.

Second, are the contributions made by the former principal secretary to the Prime Minister, his belief in public service and dedicating his work to the cause of all Canadians.

We know two processes are already under way to investigate the alleged allegations referenced in the motion. First, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights began hearing witnesses on this issue on Thursday, February 21, in response to a motion that was initiated. Second, the Ethics Commissioner is conducting an investigation, as we speak. That was also initiated by members of the opposition.

There is every reason to believe that these two mechanisms, one composed of Canada's elected representatives and one representing a non-partisan perspective, are up to the task of considering the very questions that are being asked by Canadians and by the members on the other side of the aisle.

With that in mind, it would be beneficial to begin by discussing the rules, responsibilities and powers of the justice committee in its review of this matter in addition to what the committee has already heard and what witnesses it will hear from.

[*Translation*]

As with other large deliberative assemblies, the House of Commons has taken advantage of the greater flexibility available in committees to carry out functions that can be better performed in smaller groups, including the examination of witnesses and detailed consideration of legislation, estimates and technical matters. Committee work provides detailed information to parliamentarians on issues of concern to the electorate and, as we well know, often provokes important public debate.

In addition, because committees interact directly with the public, they provide an immediate and visible conduit between elected representatives and Canadians. Committees are extensions of the House, created by either standing or special orders, and are limited in their powers by the authority delegated to them. For House of Commons committees, the Standing Committee on Procedure and

House Affairs establishes a list of members of the various standing committees at the start of each session and during the course of a session, if necessary. This list takes effect once it is approved by the House. As stipulated in the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, most standing committees have 10 members. Party representation on committees reflects the party standings in the House.

Committees can gather the information necessary for their studies in a number of ways, including by hearing testimony during meetings, accepting briefs and written opinions, requesting the production of documents, organizing round tables and visiting locations. Most often, committees gather information on a particular subject by hearing from witnesses and consulting briefs. With the exception of standing joint committees and certain standing committees, the Standing Orders set out a general mandate for all standing committees. They are empowered to study and report to the House on all matters relating to the mandate, organization, management and operation of the departments assigned to them by the House.

More specifically, they can review and report on the statute law relating to the departments assigned to them; the program and policy objectives of those departments and the effectiveness of their implementation thereof; the immediate, medium and long-term expenditure plans of those departments and the effectiveness of the implementation thereof; and an analysis of the relative success of those departments in meeting their objectives.

• (1235)

In addition to this general mandate, other matters are routinely referred by the House to its standing committees, such as bills, estimates, order in council appointments, documents tabled in the House pursuant to statute, and specific matters which the House wishes to have studied.

In each case, the House chooses the most appropriate committee on the basis of its mandate.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights has the power to review and report on the policies, programs, and expenditure plans of the Department of Justice.

As hon. members know, the department has the mandate to support the dual roles of the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General of Canada, the chief law officer of the Crown. The committee also has the power to study the policies, programs and legislation of the following entities: the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the Office of the Commissioner for Federal Judicial Affairs Canada, the Supreme Court of Canada, the Courts Administration Service, the Administrative Tribunals Support Service of Canada and the Public Prosecution Service of Canada.

In particular, the committee may review proposed amendments to federal legislation relating to certain aspects of the criminal law, family law, human rights law, and the administration of justice, notably with respect to the following statutes: the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the Divorce Act, the Civil Marriage Act, the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Judges Act, the Courts Administration Service Act and the Supreme Court Act.

Business of Supply

The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights may also undertake studies on subjects related to its mandate, either as referred to it by the House of Commons or on its own initiative. For example, they recently conducted a study on juror mental health, and prior to that, they conducted a study on human trafficking in Canada.

In the course of a study, the committee holds public meetings, considers evidence from witnesses, and reviews written submissions and other authoritative documents. In the case of their human trafficking study, they also travelled across Canada to hold private sessions with witnesses who were uncomfortable testifying in a public forum. This enabled them to hear from witnesses that they otherwise might not have been able to hear from but whose testimony was crucial to their study.

At the conclusion of a study, the committee usually reports its findings and makes recommendations. The committee may request a government response within 120 days.

[English]

As we know, the committee met on Thursday, February 21, and heard from the hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, the deputy minister of justice and deputy attorney general of Canada, Madame Nathalie Drouin, as well as the Clerk of the Privy Council, Mr. Michael Wernick. All of these witnesses provided helpful information at committee to assist it, and Canadians generally, to understand the scenario addressed in the member's motion we are debating today, in addition to the roles and responsibilities of the Attorney General of Canada.

For example, when asked if it would be appropriate for the Prime Minister and officials to discuss the matter in question with the Attorney General of Canada, the Attorney General, in his testimony, confirmed, "Those kinds of conversations would be appropriate". Mr. Wernick, as Clerk of the Privy Council, reiterated this view in his own testimony later the same day.

When asked about conversations with cabinet colleagues in his role as Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and whether they were appropriate, the Attorney General of Canada answered, "Absolutely".

As the Prime Minister has indicated, he is seeking the counsel of the Attorney General of Canada regarding the issue of solicitor-client privilege. The Attorney General has assured Canadians that he is seized with the urgency of this matter and is seeking the best approach to provide transparency to Canadians and fairness to the former attorney general in a way that does not compromise solicitor-client or litigation privilege.

• (1240)

To that end, solicitor-client privilege is an exceedingly important part of Canada's legal system and should only be waived in the appropriate circumstances.

It is a protection that allows lawyers across this country, many of whom find seats in this very chamber, to engage on the toughest issues known in law and provide their clients with candid and comprehensive advice. This includes the current Attorney General of Canada who is the government's lawyer. The Attorney General must be allowed to provide that advice to the Prime Minister and would be

unable to do so in a candid and comprehensive manner if solicitor-client privilege were waived.

As the former attorney general, the member for Vancouver Granville, has stated, the issue of solicitor-client privilege is complex and layered. That is why the current Attorney General is studying carefully the very best approach to provide transparency to Canadians and fairness to the former attorney general in a way that does not compromise solicitor-client privilege or litigation privilege, which is important to underscore as there are currently not one but two pending litigation matters involving SNC-Lavalin before Canadian courts.

Madame Nathalie Drouin, the deputy minister of justice and deputy attorney general of Canada, helpfully explained in her testimony before the committee last week that "The Attorney General is supported by the DPP, the director of public prosecutions. Please note that the DPP is also a deputy attorney general of Canada. The DPP is responsible for initiating and conducting federal criminal prosecutions on behalf of the Crown."

During his important testimony before the committee last week, the Clerk of the Privy Council, Mr. Michael Wernick, whom I previously referenced, indicated that on February 12 the director of public prosecutions issued the following statement, which can be found on the director's website: "I am confident that our prosecutors, in this and every other case, exercise their discretion independently and free from any political or partisan consideration."

The testimony of Mr. Michael Wernick was especially helpful in light of his decades of service as a senior public servant under both Conservative and Liberal governments. As the Prime Minister has stated, this, "leaves him well positioned to understand what our institutions are grounded in and make sure we are doing the right things as a government" and "He is someone we need to heed very carefully when he chooses to express himself publicly".

Mr. Wernick went on at that committee. I will reiterate it for the purposes of the record of today's debate. He stated, "If you boil it down for Canadians as to what is going on here with the facts that we have and all of the facts that I know from my participation in meetings and conversations, we are discussing lawful advocacy".

Again, I am quoting Mr. Michael Wernick, the Clerk of the Privy Council of Canada, the most senior civil servant in this country. He went on to say that his view "very firmly" was that the conversations with the former minister of justice and attorney general of Canada "were entirely appropriate, lawful, legal."

We know that after the justice committee's in-camera meeting of February 19 of this year, the committee members announced that they will be calling the former minister of justice and attorney general of Canada, the member for Vancouver Granville, as well as several academics to appear before the committee and give testimony. Those hearings are expected to take place this very week. The committee may well then decide to hear from more witnesses, as is its jurisdiction and its purview.

Business of Supply

Under the Liberal government, committees are masters of their own agenda. Committees of this House do exemplary work. Everyone in this chamber recognizes that because everyone in this chamber, save for cabinet members, participates in that committee work. We are confident that the committee meetings will continue to be thoroughly and fairly conducted and will provide Canadians with the answers and information that they seek.

In the remaining portion of my time, I want to address the Ethics Commissioner's investigation. I turn briefly now to the study that will be conducted by the Ethics Commissioner.

Under the Conflict of Interest Act, a member of the Senate or House of Commons who has reasonable grounds to believe that a public officer holder, which includes the Prime Minister, has contravened the act may in writing request that the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner examine the matter.

● (1245)

In conducting this kind of investigation, the commissioner has many powers. First is the power to summon witnesses and require them, first, “to give evidence—orally or in writing—on oath” or “on affirmation”, and second, “to produce any documents and things that the Commissioner considers necessary.”

For the purposes of enforcing these powers, the commissioner has the same powers as a court of record in civil cases. The subject of the complaint also has the opportunity to make submissions to the commissioner.

[*Translation*]

The commissioner is required to provide the Prime Minister with a report setting out the facts in question, as well as the commissioner's analysis and conclusions in relation to the request made by a parliamentarian. The report is to be provided to the person who made the request, the public office holder who is the subject of the request, and the public.

The commissioner may not include in the report any information that he or she is required to keep confidential, unless the information is essential for the purposes of establishing the grounds for any conclusion in a report.

As I have explained, these two processes are already under way. Both are investigating the allegations raised by the motion that is before us today. I am entirely confident that these two processes will be thoroughly and fairly conducted and will provide Canadians with the answers and information they seek. There is every reason to believe that these two groups are up to the task of considering the questions that are being asked.

[*English*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, I am very pleased to congratulate the hon. parliamentary secretary for the quality of his French and all the effort he puts in. I really appreciate it.

[*Translation*]

I am sure that the parliamentary secretary wants to get the whole truth, as do we. For this to happen, the key figures in the Liberal SNC-Lavalin scandal must be able to testify.

The member will agree that the Liberals initially refused to allow the former attorney general to testify. The Liberals finally reconsidered in response to public pressure, and it is very likely that the former attorney general will appear tomorrow.

On Thursday, the committee heard from Canada's top public servant, the Clerk of the Privy Council. His testimony shed a new light on the Liberal SNC-Lavalin scandal. We learned that the minute the director of public prosecutions informed SNC-Lavalin of her decision on September 4, SNC-Lavalin started lobbying the government.

The Prime Minister and the former attorney general met on September 17, and the Prime Minister's principal secretary and the former attorney general met on December 5. On December 19, Canada's top public servant called the former attorney general directly. These three events were an attempt to exert pressure regarding the Liberal SNC-Lavalin scandal.

After the former attorney general was pressured by the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister's principal secretary and the top-ranking public servant, probably the three most powerful people in the Canadian government, would the best way to get to the bottom of this story not be for the Prime Minister himself to appear before a parliamentary committee to clearly explain to Canadians what happened?

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his compliments on my French. It is very important to acknowledge our country's official bilingualism.

As part of this debate, he first mentioned that the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights made the important decision to hear from a number of people, including the former minister of justice and attorney general of Canada.

Second, he talked about the testimony Mr. Wernick gave before the committee a few days ago. Mr. Wernick gave the same answer as the current Attorney General, namely that the conversations were appropriate. The clerk indicated that those kinds of conversations take place between ministers on a daily basis and said that not only are they appropriate, but that the Prime Minister clearly said it was up to the justice minister to make that decision.

That is the kind of testimony the committee has heard. The members on this side of the House believe that we need to let the committee conduct its own investigation.

● (1250)

[*English*]

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary spoke about the importance of two processes that are under way: the first, the justice committee; and the second, the review inquiry by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

At the justice committee, he talked about how that committee is “master of its own agenda”, but of course the Liberals have a majority on that committee. Canadians need to know that when we tried to get more witnesses to attend, including Gerry Butts, Mr. Bouchard and Jessica Prince, they voted that down, saying that we should wait and see what the former attorney general has to say.

Business of Supply

As to what she can say, the new Attorney General came and said that solicitor-client privilege is very complex, and the member just said today that we are still studying that, etc. It is hard for us to understand that, since the clerk himself, after 30-some years of experience, said in an answer to me that he had concluded that solicitor-client privilege did not even apply in these circumstances.

It is very murky as to how the justice committee is going to get to the bottom of this. As for the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, we know very well that the complaint is about section 9, where a decision of another person to improperly further another person's private interests is at stake.

This may not even apply in these circumstances at all based on past practice.

Would the hon. parliamentary secretary not agree that we need a public inquiry to get to the bottom of this?

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for his contributions to today's debate, his contributions generally in this chamber, as well as his significant contributions at the justice committee.

In terms of responding to the point just raised, first of all, it is absolutely correct that there is a majority of government members at that committee, as there is at the majority of committees in this chamber. That is set, as I mentioned in my opening statement, pursuant to the rules of the chamber, which is that the representation in committees reflects representation in the chamber.

What I would indicate to the member opposite, and he would know this very well, as I mentioned earlier that there are many lawyers in this chamber, is that Mr. Wernick gave a response in committee. That response speaks for itself. However, the former attorney general has said it is "layered" and complex when you assess issues of privilege and confidence.

There is not just one issue at stake; there are actually four issues. The first is solicitor-client privilege, and we have heard the member opposite and Mr. Wernick in that regard. The second is the duty that any lawyer owes to their client. The third is the issue of cabinet confidence. The fourth is the issue of litigation privilege, and, as I mentioned earlier, there are two ongoing court cases. All four of those components need to be assessed, evaluated and analyzed before a robust and accurate understanding can be made in terms of what applies here and what can be disclosed to the public.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we keep hearing from members in this House that committees are independent. That is simply not true. At every committee of this House, whip's staff are in attendance to make sure that members are in compliance.

We also have a situation where, on February 13, Liberal members of the justice committee openly admitted that an office of a member of the government, the House leader, openly coordinated with the Liberal members on the appearance of witnesses in front of the committee.

Clearly, committees of this House are under the thumb of the government. That is why we need an order of this House to ensure that the committee hears from the Prime Minister. I would remind

members of this House that, in my view, it is a violation of parliamentary privilege, a violation of members' rights, for any member of the government, of the cabinet, to even communicate with a member of the committee about the business of the committee.

I would quote from page 265 of the 24th edition of Erskine May, *Parliamentary Practice*, where it says, "the chairman of a select committee...had exceeded the bounds of propriety in participating in a conversation with a government whip about matters within that committee's remit."

We are far from that independence of a committee in this place. That is why we need this order of the House to be adopted, to ensure that the committee does its work and holds the government accountable and gets to the bottom of this mess. It is clear to members of this House and to me that the committee is under the control of the majority, under the control of the government House leader's office and the whip's office.

That is why I encourage Liberal members who are not part of the government to support this motion. I encourage six or seven of them to join with us to support this motion to ensure that the Prime Minister is brought in front of committee to get to the bottom of this matter.

• (1255)

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I have a few responses to the intervention by the member opposite. First of all, the statement he is referring to, which arose from the earliest iteration of the justice committee hearings during the constituency week, was clarified by the member for Edmonton Centre in French later on during those very same hearings. I urge the member opposite to consult that part of Hansard.

I will confess that I have a tremendous amount of respect for the member opposite and his contributions in this chamber. However, I find it a little particular, and perhaps even a bit rich, for that comment to be coming from that member, because the track record of the previous government was to completely manhandle and manipulate committees, using parliamentary secretaries such as me for that purpose. In fact, that is precisely why we campaigned on a platform to change the role of parliamentary secretaries and why they are much more constrained in their behaviour.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, if evidence is needed on the part of the other side as to the liberties of individual government members to vote as they see fit, we can look to the actual results of the vote on the motion previously presented by the New Democratic Party, in which there were some dissenting government voices heard.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I want to remind hon. members that while someone is speaking, shouting across the floor to them does not make it easy to hear them. I would like to hear what is going on. I am sure others in the room would like to hear that as well.

As a reminder, if you are shouting at someone and holding your hand up to your mouth, the Speaker knows it is you who is speaking.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Victoria.

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Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the motion before us to compel the Prime Minister of Canada to appear before the justice committee to answer questions in this affair, which has grown and changed over the last couple of weeks in quite dramatic ways.

I would like to begin by indicating what I would like to say in my remarks by way of outline. I would like to provide a bit of history about how we arrived here and the changing narrative of the government side. I would then like to talk about the role of the independent Attorney General and how precious that is in our democracy. I would like to try to then refute the argument that somehow everything is fine because the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is going to have carriage of this. Lastly, I would like to talk about the issue of deferred prosecution agreements or remediation agreements, which have been put into the Criminal Code quite recently, only coming into force in September of last year and which are at the centre of this issue.

With that in mind, I would like to talk about the sequence of events that has led us here.

A Globe and Mail story reported that there apparently had been pressure put on the former attorney general in respect of a criminal prosecution. The Prime Minister's immediate response, and there were many, was that he did not direct her to do a particular thing.

That wording is important, because I think it is common ground between the government and the opposition that directing an independent attorney general to do something with a criminal matter is wrong. It is in fact unconstitutional, violating one of the key constitutional conventions of our democracy, and that is that we have the right to an independent, not political, decision-maker when a person is going to be subject to criminal charges.

The Prime Minister started by saying that he did not direct her to do certain things. However, that was never the story in the first place. The story was that she was pressured to do certain things, and I will come back to that.

Then, of course, the clerk appeared last week to say that there was vigorous debate, but there was simply lawful advocacy, no inappropriate pressure. I will develop why this matters in a moment.

There is a convention, a decision, called the Shawcross principle, which was generated in 1951 by a labour attorney general in the United Kingdom. It talks about the line that cannot be crossed. That is now a part of Canadian law and is referred to as the Shawcross principle. That line is that it is absolutely appropriate, and in fact sometimes very desirable, to have an attorney general discuss matters with his or her cabinet colleagues, but the final decision has to be his or her decision alone. The question before us is whether or not there was pressure that crossed that line, which, of course, comes to what happened.

On September 4, an independent person called the director of public prosecutions communicated to a company called SNC-Lavalin that there would not be a deferred prosecution agreement, that she was going to proceed in her decision with a prosecution of this matter in criminal court. Thereafter, it appears that the former attorney general, who has the ability under the statute to reverse that, to give a direction to that person, decided not to budge. I do not think

the law even applies here, as I will describe in a moment. However, even if the law did apply in these circumstances, it is not my judgment that there ought to be a deferred prosecution agreement in these circumstances. It is her decision and her decision alone.

Then what happened was that on September 17, this issue came up in cabinet with the Prime Minister. We have heard testimony to confirm that. On December 5, the Prime Minister's powerful chief of staff, Gerry Butts, confirmed that there was a meeting at the Chateau Laurier where this issue was discussed again.

We must remember that the decision of the independent director of public prosecutions had already been made and it was not to be changed, as said by the attorney general.

On December 18, there was a meeting between Katie Telford and Gerry Butts, of the Prime Minister's Office, and the chief of staff to the former attorney general on this topic.

● (1300)

On December 19, the Clerk of the Privy Council, the most powerful public servant in the country, Mr. Wernick, told us at committee that he needed to "check in" with her to give her context in a phone call. Then there was Christmas, as usual, in December, and then there was a cabinet shuffle. Mr. Brison decided that he would leave, as we all know. There were only a couple of people affected by that cabinet shuffle, one of whom was the former attorney general, who was removed from that position and, as everyone knows, shortly thereafter resigned from cabinet.

The issue is whether there was inappropriate pressure upon the former attorney general. If there was, there are those who would argue that there was an obstruction of justice. When there is interference, reasonably perceived by an objective person, with the administration of justice, that is obstruction. It is a serious criminal charge, and we need to get to the bottom of it.

The question then becomes, was there inappropriate pressure? Was that line I talked about crossed? Let us examine it for a moment. First, it would appear to a reasonable person that the former attorney general did feel that this pressure existed. Imagine how many times this issue came up after the final decision was made. Imagine how many different people, both in the bureaucracy at the highest level and in the Prime Minister's Office at the highest level, tried to speak to her about this issue. "What part of 'no' don't you understand?", I hear her say. I was not there.

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The Clerk of the Privy Council felt that he could advise us that, in fact, there was no inappropriate pressure. With the greatest of respect to an honourable senior public servant of great experience and service to Canada, how does he know? Was he at every one of those meetings? There were 50 meetings with people from SNC-Lavalin. There were 18 meetings with the Prime Minister's Office alone. He was not there, nor was he there when meetings with the former attorney general were taking place, out of earshot, at the Chateau Laurier or who knows where. With great respect, first, he does not know, and second, he is not the former attorney general and cannot tell us what she felt and inferred from that conduct.

Let us look at the objective standard of whether this line was crossed. There were so many different people and so many different conversations and so much relentless advocacy to change a position. What about the consequences for not doing so? She is gone. The government does not like to hear the word "fired", so I will say that she was removed from that role. I guess there were consequences, some would infer, from that undue pressure. I would, but I want to hear from her.

That takes us to the justice committee. The parliamentary secretary made much of the fact that this independent master of its own procedure at committee is going to get to the bottom of this. Excuse me, but we tried to do so. We tried to get other people than simply the former attorney general to come to committee, and we were swatted down like flies. They said that maybe after they heard from her, they might allow us to hear from the other people, the only other people who can tell the other side of the story. One would think they would want that if they felt there was nothing going on here, but they do not seem to want that.

Maybe there is another theory. Maybe the straw that broke the camel's back in the mind of our former attorney general was that the government continued to have a yawning gap between the rhetoric and the reality of indigenous law reform. It is no secret that the former attorney general was pushing hard on that. She made a number of speeches that seemed to suggest that she was unhappy with that. Frankly, maybe this clumsy effort to pressure her in this matter and then to have her removed was the straw that broke the camel's back. I simply do not know.

We heard this morning from the hon. parliamentary secretary, and from the Prime Minister on many occasions and from the Clerk of the Privy Council at committee, that we should not worry. They are going to have an inquiry by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, and that is going to be good enough. With all due respect, it will not be good enough, because it is almost certain that there will not be anything found to be wrong in these circumstances, not because of the facts but because of the wording of section 9 of the Conflict of Interest Act, under which the commissioner has said he will do an investigation.

• (1305)

Mr. Dion, the investigator, said that he has "reason to believe that a possible contravention of section 9 [of the act] may have occurred". Section 9 prohibits a public office holder from seeking to influence a decision by another person so as to improperly further another person's private interest, which is what he said he is going to look at. However, here is the punchline: All the other cases that have

ever been decided by former commissioner Mary Dawson and others have said that there is nothing in the act to suggest that political interests are to be included in the concept of private interests. If it is money, okay, but if it is other things, no. Therefore, there is very little likelihood that it will lead Canadians any closer to the truth, which we must have in these circumstances. Frankly, it is not about the Prime Minister and interests. It is about whether there was interference with the independent role of the former attorney general.

What about these deferred prosecution agreements, which was what was at stake here? I have to say that there is a great deal of griping as to whether these agreements would even be applicable in these circumstances. I have mentioned that they have not been used, because they are brand new. They were put into an omnibus budget bill, which kind of sounds like the Harper government. At the end of a big budget bill, we had a couple of sections thrown in.

I was on the justice committee. We had a half hour or an afternoon on this particular section, and I can assure members that the words "SNC-Lavalin" were never mentioned. We had no idea that this was what was at issue. These things were described as important changes to deal with white collar crime.

Deferred prosecution agreements do have a role to play in our system, but they may not be applicable here, because there are certain conditions set out in the Criminal Code before they can apply. For example, one has to voluntarily disclose wrongdoing, admit corporate responsibility, make reparations to people, and so forth. Maybe there was just no way this square peg could fit into that round hole. It may just be that there was no way these even applied.

What would we expect an attorney general to do? "I would love to help you, but in fact, the law doesn't allow it". The punchline here is that under the corrupt foreign practices legislation Canada has, if the defence says that it is going to be harmful to our national economic interest, it is not applicable. The whole lobby by SNC-Lavalin, this gigantic 50-times-they-met-people lobby, was to try to tell us about the national economic interest. Therefore, for a number of reasons, people are wondering whether the former attorney general was being asked to do something that was simply not possible or was, in fact, illegal.

What were they trying to do if that was the case? Were they trying to get something done that was illegal, or were they trying to get the law changed so we could fix it? Today we read in the *The Globe and Mail* something that may be the answer. If one is found guilty of bribery or fraud abroad, one cannot do business with the Government of Canada for 10 years. However, do not worry, it appears that help is on the way. We are going to change that and say that we may give some discretion to some public servant to kind of change that 10 years to maybe six months, a slap on the wrist or something. If we cannot do it one way, if we cannot pressure an Attorney General to perhaps change things, then we will find another way to fix it.

This is serious. Transparency International reported in its 2018 report that Canada is lagging its fellow OECD countries on this issue. We are not doing the job. We have “regressed”, to use the word it put in its 2018 report. Therefore, it is serious. At the OECD and other places, the Prime Minister and Canada have talked about how we are right behind efforts to get at international white collar crime, bribery abroad and the like and that we were with them all the way. Well, maybe this was just another broken promise, and maybe that is what the former attorney general was thinking when she resigned.

The Liberals promised modest deficits when they ran, but they broke that promise. In my part of the world, they promised to redo the process that gave us this dreadful project that is going to do serious harm to southern resident killer whales and the indigenous way of life on the coast. They promised to “redo” that. He came to my riding and said that. I was there. However, he did not do that.

• (1310)

The Liberals promised to change the electoral system. My colleagues will remember that. I think it was several hundred times we heard the promise that the last election would be the last one under the first-past-the-post system. Of course, the Liberals changed their minds on that as well.

However, the promise I think Canadians have the right to care about the most, the one that was probably the most important, if one were to stand back from it, in a democracy, and the one that certainly got my attention, was the commitment to openness and accountability. I was completely in favour of that. I did a lot of work in the earlier part of my life on freedom of information. I believed the Liberals. I wanted to believe the government.

“It is time to shine more light on government”, it said in the Liberal 2015 campaign program.

“Openness and transparency will be our constant companions”, the Prime Minister said.

I would like to have a little openness and transparency at the justice committee. I would like to have an opportunity to hear from the protagonists in this important debate, the people in the Prime Minister’s Office and the former attorney general.

I can tell members that I am not very optimistic, because Mr. Wernick, who has been 37 years in the public service, concluded, in an answer to a question I posed, that solicitor-client privilege does not apply here. It is not about litigation privilege. Solicitor-client privilege is about when a lawyer gives advice to a client and has to go to the grave with any secrets he or she hears in advising that client. Lots of lawyers say that it is simply not applicable in these circumstances, because we are not talking about advice. We are talking about whether a person was browbeaten in the exercise of her authority as the former attorney general. That is the issue here.

With regard to litigation privilege, there are two lawsuits. One is a case in Montreal, I believe, which has to do with fraud and bribery. It has nothing to do with what is going on here, nothing, not a thing. It does not talk about litigation and public privilege and the Attorney General. The second case is what most lawyers who do administrative law would call a Hail Mary pass. Believe it or not, SNC-Lavalin is seeking a judicial review of the prosecutorial discretion of

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the independent director of public prosecutions because she made a mistake in how she exercised her discretion. If ever there was a Hail Mary pass, it is that one. Those are the two cases the government wants to hide behind on the basis of litigation and public privilege.

Let us just review this. First, Mr. Wernick says that there is no such thing in these circumstances. I agree with him. Second, we have no advice to the government in the circumstances at all. That is not at issue. Third, the government refers to litigation privilege in two cases that have literally nothing to do with this. I am very proud of our justice committee chair, who concluded that any effort to use the sub judice rule in that regard would not likely be of any merit. I do not see that as an issue at all.

I know that we can get caught up in the weeds here. I know that we can get right into the specifics while Canadians wonder what the big deal is. This is not climate. This is not the housing crisis. This is not the opioid crisis. However, this is our democracy. This is about whether we live in a banana republic or not. Do we live in a country where we respect the rule of law and the independence of the Attorney General, or do we not? Are we prepared to take a risk and not thoroughly investigate whether there was improper interference, at the highest level, with the role of an Attorney General of Canada? I am not saying that there was. I do not know. I was not there. However, the Liberals would use their majority in the justice committee to not allow us to find that out, to hide behind solicitor-client privilege. The Attorney General could not tell us what it was or what was so complicated. He could not tell us who could waive it. Read the testimony.

Canadians deserve answers. We need to get to the bottom of this. It is important for democracy. It is important for the House of Commons. It is important for Canada.

• (1315)

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, my colleague, as we heard, sits at committee and does some really good work. He has also sat at the veterans committee. I have always appreciated his feedback. However, I believe he has to admit that it is the responsibility of the members of Parliament and of the people of Canada to share with the minister or the Attorney General or the Prime Minister some of the concerns and issues we have. I hope he does not think we should not share that information. It is part of democracy. As the Attorney General and Mr. Wernick indicated, there was proper discussion. They clearly underlined that as well.

How many people in the NDP caucus spoke to the former attorney general in the last year? The Conservatives said that they had spoken to her at various times as part of the job of sharing information. Did any of the NDP speak to the former attorney general in the last year, and if not, why not? Again, we need to share that information.

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Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, the first point made by the member for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook was that ministers of the Crown could share information and discuss it with others. As I said in my remarks, I not only think it is right, but that it is necessary for an attorney general to speak with his or her cabinet colleagues and others about the issues before that attorney general. In fact, Lord Simon in England said that one would be a fool not to in many circumstances, and I agree.

However, the role of a cabinet member minister of justice is very distinct from the role of an attorney general. In places like England, he or she would not even sit in the cabinet because of the concerns we see today. Therefore, proper discussion is fine.

The member pointed out that the Clerk of the Privy Council, Mr. Wernick, said that there was proper discussion. First, he was not at all of those meetings, and he could not have been as there have been so many, with the former attorney general, and he acknowledged that. Second, he is not the arbiter of whether there was proper discussion or whether the line I referred to was crossed. Third, looking at the facts as we know them, an objective, reasonable person would say that with all this pressure coming from so many different people it looks like there was improper pressure.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Victoria raised some excellent points. He noted a few things are important.

I would argue nothing is more important than the constitutional order that governs the country. Tax policy comes and goes, climate change policy gets changed government to government, programs come and go, but what endures and has endured in the country for at least 150 years is our constitutional order. The matter in front of the House today concerns some very grave allegations between the Prime Minister and the former attorney general.

I want to add a point to the excellent points made by the member for Victoria, which is about the Shawcross doctrine. The Shawcross doctrine, which is the constitutional convention adopted by all attorneys general of the country, makes it clear that it is appropriate for an attorney general to consult, to solicit advice from her cabinet colleagues, but not the other way around. In other words, under that doctrine, it is improper for the Prime Minister or any member of the cabinet to approach an attorney general in respect of a criminal prosecution, unprompted, and ask that attorney general do something or even provide advice. The doctrine makes it clear that it is an attorney general's right to consult and solicit opinions from fellow cabinet colleagues, but not the other way around.

As the former attorney general of the Province of Ontario, Michael Bryant, has said, it is improper for a cabinet colleague, including the Prime Minister or his staff, to approach an attorney general unprompted to talk about a criminal prosecution. If the House and its committees cannot call the Prime Minister to a committee to give a full account of what actually happened, it demonstrates to Canadians that this institution and its committees are not up to the task of holding checks and balances on prime ministerial power.

• (1320)

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, I respect and admire the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills' constant efforts to improve

and reform this institution and so many other institutions. Therefore, I take very seriously the points he makes about the Constitution.

As he talked about respect for the constitutional order, it allows me to quote a sentence from the late Mark Rosenberg of the Ontario Court of Appeal, who was an expert in these matters and one of Canada's leading criminal lawyers ever. He wrote this in the *Queen's Law Journal*:

The most important of these constitutional conventions is that although the Attorney General is a cabinet minister, he or she acts independently of the cabinet in the exercise of the prosecution function.

That was the most important one he thought, which is really important.

The Supreme Court also said in 2002 that we had to respect the fact that an attorney general was “fully independent from the political pressures of the government.”

Was that line crossed here? It does not appear to me that the Liberals are that anxious to find out. If it is simply partisan politics before an election period, I guess we can understand that they would throw back at us that somehow we are just trying to make political hay out of this, that there is nothing here and to drive on. They might be right that there is nothing here. However, they will not let us find out if they hide behind solicitor-client privilege, will not waive it if it does indeed exist, and will not let us hear from the people who need to come and advise Canadians as to what happened.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Victoria, for his well-reasoned arguments in his support for this motion.

When the former attorney general was moved out of her cabinet post, I was very struck by the letter she released to Canadians, in which mentioned speaking “truth to power” and ensuring our justice system was free from political interference. Then of course came her resignation the day after the Prime Minister stated that her continued presence in cabinet spoke for itself.

Last week, we heard her unprecedented point of order during a vote, in which she clearly explained that she was abstaining and that she hoped to be able to speak her truth one day. She has also retained the services of a previous Supreme Court justice. Are these the actions of a woman who has nothing to say? I would argue they are not.

Let us combine this with The Globe and Mail story. The Globe and Mail does not run a front-page story with sources unless it has verified them. Then we have the constantly changing narrative. The government is always changing tactics in response to new information, the steady drip that is coming out.

When my hon. colleague looks at the government's actions and words over the last two weeks, does he think these are the actions of a government that truly has nothing to hide?

Mr. Murray Rankin: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford for his reminder that on two or three occasions, the former attorney general has used the expression “speaking truth to power” and has asked to do so. As he said, she has also retained a former Supreme Court justice as her counsel to give her advice.

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It sure seems to me that she has something to tell us. It sure seems to me that she wants to speak her truth. However, I am very sad to say I have yet to believe the government wants to hear that story.

Canadians have a right to hear her for all of those constitutionally vital reasons I described earlier. I hope the government will get beyond its talking points and its political imperatives here, think about the big picture and why it is reasonable that people want to know whether there was improper interference in the exercise of her independent prosecutorial responsibilities. Yes or no?

•(1325)

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Calgary Nose Hill.

I rise in strong support of our Conservative opposition motion to call on the Prime Minister to appear before the justice committee, under oath, so he can answer questions about his involvement in the interference of the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin.

As each day passes, it is becoming clearer and clearer that the Prime Minister is up to his eyeballs in this sordid affair. With each day, it seems there is a new version of events from the Prime Minister.

When *The Globe and Mail* article was first published, the Prime Minister hoped he could wash his hands clean of the entire matter by issuing a blanket denial. When that was not going to cut it, the Prime Minister gave a carefully crafted legal response, which stated that the decision was the former attorney general's and the former attorney general's alone. Then he said that the fact the former attorney general was still in cabinet spoke for itself. Well, the former attorney general immediately resigned from cabinet following that statement. So much for that explanation.

The Prime Minister then stated that there was no pressure exerted on the former attorney general, until last Thursday, when the Clerk of the Privy Council, Michael Wernick, appeared before our committee and admitted that, in fact, there was pressure. Wernick said that we should not worry, because there was no inappropriate pressure, as if there is a distinction between appropriate pressure and inappropriate pressure. The fact is that any pressure exerted on the former attorney general is entirely inappropriate.

In that regard, I would like to make reference to the late Justice Rosenberg and his dissertation on the independence of the office of Attorney General, wherein he summarizes the Shawcross doctrine. Justice Rosenberg stated, “responsibility for the decision is that of the Attorney General alone; the government is not to put pressure on him or her.” Period, no pressure.

What we are also learning, as a result of the testimony of Mr. Wernick, is that the Prime Minister's version of events, his explanation about what happened, is simply untrue. The Prime Minister said that it was the attorney general's decision alone and that there was no pressure.

In fact, it turns out that the former attorney general did make a decision, and she unambiguously communicated that decision to the Prime Minister on September 17. Her decision was that she would

not overturn the decision of the direction of public prosecutions not to enter into a deferred prosecution agreement with SNC-Lavalin.

One would expect that upon this decision being conveyed to the Prime Minister, that Prime Minister, out of respect for the former attorney general, out of respect for the independence of the office of Attorney General and the sanctity of that independence, would have left it at that and accepted the decision. However, that is not what happened.

What happened following September 17, when the former attorney general announced to the Prime Minister her decision, was a concerted campaign, orchestrated and coordinated by the Prime Minister, through his surrogates, to change the former attorney general's mind. In that regard, it is important we go through some of the important timelines.

•(1330)

We know that on December 5, the former attorney general met with Gerald Butts, the Prime Minister's principal secretary and top political adviser, to discuss—guess what? It was SNC-Lavalin. On September 17, the decision had been made. Nearly three months later, the Prime Minister's top political adviser is talking to the former attorney general about that decision. When the former attorney general did not appear to bow to Mr. Butts, we learn that Mr. Butts and Katie Telford, the Prime Minister's chief of staff, hauled the former attorney general's chief of staff before them to discuss yet again the SNC-Lavalin matter and the matter of a deferred prosecution agreement.

Then to make it ever so clear that they were not satisfied with the decision of the former attorney general not to intervene, the Clerk of the Privy Council, Mr. Wernick, on December 19, met with the Prime Minister. Following that meeting, he saw fit to pick up the phone and, as he put it, “check in on the SNC-Lavalin file” with the former attorney general. He further stated, “I conveyed to her that a lot of her colleagues and the Prime Minister were quite anxious about what they were hearing and reading”.

He said “quite anxious”. I thought a decision had already been made. The Prime Minister says it is her decision and her decision alone, that there was no pressure, yet what we learned is that following that decision, there were meetings involving the Prime Minister, his chief of staff, his principal secretary and the Clerk of the Privy Council. The Prime Minister can say with a straight face that the decision was hers and hers alone to make and that there was no pressure; it is an insult to Canadians that the Prime Minister would have the audacity to say that in the face of that chronology.

However, it gets worse from the public interest standpoint. As soon as the Clerk of the Privy Council expressed the anxiousness of the Prime Minister, the former attorney general went on vacation. It was Christmastime and the new year. I think she was in Bali, and before she could make it back to Ottawa, she had a call from the Prime Minister to come back to Ottawa. When she came back, she found out that she was going to be fired as the Attorney General, and she was. At the first opportunity, the Prime Minister fired her.

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He said it was her decision and her decision alone to make. What we are learning is that there was only one decision that the Prime Minister would accept, which was to overrule the director of public prosecutions. The only decision the Prime Minister was prepared to accept was to interfere in an independent criminal prosecution, and until that decision was made, the Prime Minister did not care to what lengths he would go or the lengths that he would instruct his officials to go in interfering with the independence of the office of the Attorney General, and that is a very, very serious matter. That is highly problematic.

Quite frankly, it is time for the Prime Minister to come clean. It is time for the Prime Minister to be transparent. It is time for the Prime Minister to provide the answers that Canadians deserve. That is precisely what our motion seeks to do. If the Prime Minister has nothing to hide, then he should come before a committee, be put under oath—with the consequence, by the way, of perjury—and let the sunshine come in.

● (1335)

That is what we need: sunshine. We know that this is a Prime Minister who talks about sunshine as the best disinfectant. Let him answer.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I look at an overview of the entire issue, one of the things that comes across my mind is that we had some good representation at the last justice committee. I suspect the member opposite was there. There was a fairly clear indication from Mr. Wernick that it would appear that there was no undue influence or pressure. I wonder if my friend could provide his thoughts in regard to the standing committee and the scope that it has.

We have had other Conservative members and New Democrats calling into question just how important the standing committee really is, somewhat marginalizing its importance, and that is unfortunate. The member himself understands the importance of standing committees, so I wonder if he could talk about the standing committee and at the same time about the Ethics Commissioner and if he truly believes that it is impartial and apolitical.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, first, with the greatest respect to my friend, the Parliamentary Secretary to the government House leader, he must have missed my speech, because the evidence relayed by Mr. Wernick very clearly supported and provided additional facts and information about the lengths to which the Prime Minister went to interfere in the prosecution and to interfere with the independence of the Attorney General.

With respect to the justice committee, I respect all members of that committee. I have served with them on the committee for the last three and a half years, and that is why I have been so disappointed that its members have done the bidding of the Prime Minister's Office as part of this broader cover-up. I say that simply because they have repeatedly blocked efforts to call relevant witnesses, including Gerald Butts, including Mathieu Bouchard and, I presume, soon including the Prime Minister.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is puzzling me and why it merits an open review not just before the committee but likely an inquiry, is the confusion apparently held

by the Liberals that there is no difference between having a discussion with the Minister of Justice and having a discussion with the Attorney General. Very clearly, they are distinct roles.

When the Minister of Justice was proposing changing the criminal law to introduce these DPA provisions to allow for deferred prosecution agreements or when the government was considering a foreign public officials act, ratified 1999, was the time to talk to the justice minister about whether it should specifically exclude consideration to economic matters, which those laws do.

I wonder if my colleague could speak to that matter. We are in a situation here in which a number of parties, including the Prime Minister, the Clerk of the Privy Council and members of the PMO continued to approach the former attorney general to speak about an ongoing prosecution, when a decision had already been made to bring forward a prosecution under the Corruption of Foreign Public Officials Act, 1999, which forbids consideration of economic matters. All that has been revealed to us thus far, until they testify, is their concern about the impact on the economy.

● (1340)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, in the last couple of days it has been quite interesting to hear the Prime Minister talking about how it is all about jobs. Mr. Wernick said something similar. I take that as an admission of guilt on the part of the Prime Minister. It was entirely improper because, as the hon. member points out, it is expressly prohibited, pursuant to paragraph 715.32(3) of the Criminal Code.

With respect to the issue of the independence of the office of the Attorney General, that could not have been made more clear than by the Supreme Court in Krieger at paragraph 3, wherein the court states:

It is a constitutional principle that the Attorneys General of this country must act independently of partisan concerns when exercising their delegated sovereign authority to initiate, continue or terminate prosecutions.

That is the heart of what is at issue.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are here today with a motion calling upon the Prime Minister of Canada to testify under oath as to what he knew or what his role was in the SNC-Lavalin affair.

For those who are watching, who may have heard about this over the last couple of weeks, I want to break down what happened.

SNC-Lavalin is a Montreal-based company. Its description is that it provides “engineering, procurement and construction services”. It has a lot of employees in the Montreal area. It has won a lot of major taxpayer-funded, multi-million-dollar contracts from the federal government, so there are a lot of votes at stake and there is a lot of profit at stake here.

In 2015, the RCMP laid charges against this company. The charges alleged that the company offered bribes worth \$47.7 million to Libyan officials, and Moammar Gadhafi's son was named in the court documents, I believe. The company is also alleged to have defrauded Libyan public agencies of approximately \$129 million.

Business of Supply

Recently we found out that the RCMP has laid out a bribery scheme here in Canada with the company, involving the \$127-million Jacques Cartier Bridge contract. In this case, a federal official pleaded guilty last year to accepting more than \$2.3 million worth of payments from this company. What is the cost of doing business here?

In 2015, the RCMP said, “Corruption of foreign officials undermines good governance and sustainable economic development.” This is a huge deal.

Fast-forward to this year. The company—this very wealthy, well-funded company—went on the lobbying spree to end all lobbying sprees. Imagine American-style lobbyists. It was a full court press on the government, on everybody. There was meeting after meeting with the Prime Minister’s Office. They would not take no for an answer, because the company wanted to get out of this. That is the motivation here.

Why? It is because if SNC-Lavalin is convicted, the company would not be able to bid on federal contracts. That is the big penalty here. There is a lot at stake.

In the budget bill, after the company’s lobbying, the Liberals snuck in something called a deferred prosecution agreement. In this bazillion-page document that had everything under the sun, the Liberals snuck in a major change to our laws. A deferred prosecution agreement, simply put, would allow SNC-Lavalin, if it went this route, to not have to go to jail or be convicted. It could just pay a fine, and then the company would also be eligible to bid on federal contracts.

This is all happening behind closed doors. It gets snuck into an omnibus budget bill, and the bill passes. However, we have something called the Public Prosecution Service, which is at arm’s length, and it is the Public Prosecution Service that makes the call on whether or not this deferred prosecution agreement is used. The public prosecutor said that no, the service was not doing this and the case was going to trial.

Then the former attorney general held firm on that decision and said it was going to trial. Then, according to the Clerk of the Privy Council in testimony last week, after the Prime Minister’s story on this issue has changed a million times, he essentially said that they went to the former attorney general and laid out the economic implications of what would happen if this went to trial and there was a conviction. This happened after she had made her decision to proceed.

What we are talking about here is the Prime Minister’s Office and the supposedly non-partisan head of the public service standing accused of being involved in obstruction of justice at the highest levels. That is why the Prime Minister needs to testify in front of Canadians.

Let me lay out five reasons that this is so important.

• (1345)

First of all, keep in mind the former attorney general stood her ground after all of this and then what happened? She was fired. The Prime Minister fired her. This is a potential obstruction of justice. This is not just an ethics breach. This is not just an Aga Khan island

slap-on-the-wrist situation. There could potentially be serious criminality involved in this.

Second, what message does this send? It sends a message to everybody in this country that there are two sets of rules, that there are two different justice systems in this country, in Canada, one for people who can afford millions of dollars for lobbyists and can apply pressure based on ridings in Montreal, and one for racialized communities, women, who do not have that opportunity. We can sit here and talk about all sorts of ways to deal with that issue, but that is the reality. There are many people in Canada who do not get this opportunity and that is a huge problem.

The third thing is that the Prime Minister, “Mr. Feminist”, acts like he is such a feminist and stands up for women. The Clerk of the Privy Council, at the justice committee last week, basically said the former attorney general experienced things differently when he was trying to explain whether this was “inappropriate pressure” that could be criminal. Where did we hear that before? The Prime Minister had a groping allegation and he used those exact same words: She experienced it “differently”. This is not he said, she said. As Maclean’s magazine said, “It’s a ‘he, he, he-said’.” He is a fake feminist.

The Prime Minister is somebody who wraps feminism around him like a warm, fuzzy cloak to get votes and then when the rubber hits the road, when lobbyists come upon him, it is “she experienced it differently” and “she should have done something else”. That is garbage. That is disgusting. He needs to be held accountable for that in front of the justice committee. One does not get to stand up and claim to be a feminist and then do that to a woman. That just cannot be done.

The Prime Minister has also kept her silent. He has kept her muzzled and on a leash while he goes out and spins this story. That is disgusting. That is wrong. He needs to be held to account for that.

Finally, as a Calgary MP, deferred prosecution agreements are not supposed to consider economic arguments, yet the Clerk of the Privy Council said in the justice committee that he told the former attorney general about the economic argument and that a lot of jobs were at stake.

Maybe the company should not have bribed Libyan officials to begin with. Maybe it should not have bribed people for contracts. Maybe there should be a cost for doing that. Where is the economic considerations for all of the punitive policies the government has put against Albertan energy companies?

Constituents in my riding are looking at this and asking why Montreal gets deferred prosecution agreements. As we found out today, the government is considering changing the rules, so even if the company is convicted, it can still bid on federal contracts. Why are those jobs better than jobs in my riding? The role of a prime minister is to unite our country. All jobs are important. The Prime Minister should stand for justice.

Business of Supply

This is disgusting. This is what every single one of us in this place should be standing up against, regardless of political stripe. Every person sitting on the Liberal backbench is not here just for themselves. They are here to stand up for justice and for their community. Their role is to hold the government to account, even if that government is of the same partisan stripe as they are. This is where the rubber hits the road. This is where we stand for what is right or we stand for nothing at all.

The Prime Minister was wrong. He should stand in front of the justice committee and answer for the fact that he has put words in a strong woman's mouth, that he said that one set of jobs is better than another set of jobs, that he stands accused of obstruction of justice.

Everybody in this country, regardless of how we vote, stands for one thing and that is the independence of our judiciary, the fact that our country can stand tall and proud and say we do not do business the same way that other countries do. That starts today with the leader of our country. He needs to be in front of this committee and he needs to be held to account.

Every person who votes against the motion will be giving him a shield for this type of abrogation of democracy. Every person who votes against the motion should be held to account by the people in their communities who do not want to be divided on this type of garbage, and this is the stuff that can divide our country.

When, at the highest level of government, the leader of our country, a fake feminist, stands up for jobs with a company that is accused of bribing Libyans, we have to get our act together and it starts with the Prime Minister.

● (1350)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member that I am going to stand up for jobs in Calgary, as I will for Winnipeg and as I will for jobs in Montreal, unlike the Conservative Party that wants to pick and choose areas and cause division. These remediation agreements are nothing new to the western world. The U.K. and the U.S.A. have them.

At the end of the day, nothing wrong has been done. I am convinced of it. Just because the Conservatives are working with the New Democrats does not mean that something wrong has actually occurred. They have been targeting personal attacks and so forth from virtually day one when they acquired the opposition benches. There is a responsibility of all members of Parliament to look at their constituents and that means there are some victims here too that need to be referred to. What about the individuals who work for SNC-Lavalin?

We want corporate responsibility and accountability and we will ensure that happens, but we are going to protect jobs, too, no matter what region of this country they happen to be in. Does the member not feel that she has an obligation to jobs not only in Calgary but in all parts of Canada?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, yelling and screaming a crock of baloney makes it no less a crock of baloney, and that is what we just heard.

For the member to stand and have the audacity to say we have a responsibility as members of Parliament, he is darn right we do and it is to stand for the rule of law. The member stood earlier today and said there was no inappropriate pressure. He just said that. He just said nothing wrong happened and we should just take the Prime Minister's word for it, who is in the middle of this. He stands at the heart of this.

The member stands here and expects all of us to just take his word for it, when his job is at stake. Do we think he is going to have his appointment if he does not defend the Prime Minister? No. Anybody in this place needs to stand against what this man just did and stand up for justice in Canada.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I look at the timeline of what has transpired over the last month, especially with respect to the former attorney general, she released a letter to Canadians when she was shuffled in cabinet, in which she spoke about truth to power and that the justice system had to be free from political interference. Then, of course, she resigned the day following the Prime Minister's comments that her presence in cabinet spoke for itself. She lawyered up with a former Supreme Court justice and then last week, there was her unprecedented point of order when she explained to the House that she abstained from the vote because she did not have the privilege yet to speak and that she hoped to be able to speak her truth one day.

When we take all of the actions of the former attorney general and place them within the constantly changing narrative of the government, are these the actions of a woman who has nothing to say and are these the actions of a government that has nothing to hide?

● (1355)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, this is exactly why every member in this place needs to vote to bring the Prime Minister to the justice committee to be held to account. This is the man at the centre of eight million changing narratives. This is the man who has dragged the impartiality of the public service into question by allowing the Clerk of the Privy Council to tell a woman that she experienced things differently. That is what is at stake here.

The fact that the Prime Minister has not been able to answer these questions and is hiding behind his back bench, his front bench, whatever, that is where democracy dies. I am not going to allow that to happen and I do not think Canadians are either. Canadians are not going to allow this sort of garbage to happen and they are not going to allow it to happen come October. Therefore, I ask my colleagues opposite and in every corner of this place to reach around, find their spine and do what is right.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would remind all members of the House that it is not unusual for a Prime Minister to appear in front of a committee. In fact, in September 2006, Prime Minister Harper appeared in front of a parliamentary committee to explain his government's actions with respect to Senate reform. In the United Kingdom, the prime minister appears three times per year, 90 minutes each time, in front a House of Commons committee to be held accountable for his or her government's actions.

Statements by Members

I encourage members opposite and all members of the House to support the motion in order for us to get to the bottom of this crisis, frankly this constitutional crisis, about the division of powers between the judicial and executive branches of government, a constitutional crisis about the Shawcross doctrine and a constitutional crisis about the independence of criminal prosecutions. We need to hear from the head of government himself: the Prime Minister.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, we have moments in this place where we have to decide to do what is right or what is right for ourselves. Any colleague opposite who stands up and votes against this is firmly doing the latter. On behalf of Canadians, I ask each and every one of them to not cover up for their boss and to make sure that he gets to committee and is held to account for this absolute disaster that is of his own making.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*Translation*]

SINGLE TAX RETURN IN QUEBEC

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the single tax return was first proposed by the National Assembly and the Quebec government, and its implementation is now being called for by key members of the business sector, including the Federation of Chambers of Commerce of Quebec, the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal, the Quebec City Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Quebec Employers' Council, the Federation of Independent Business, the Quebec Manufacturers and Exporters Association, the Quebec CPA Order and the Coalition of the Youth Chamber of Commerce in Quebec.

There are now a lot of people backing this proposal, and not all of them are separatists. These people are asking for one thing, namely that the government focus on what is best for taxpayers. It is in the interest of taxpayers to have a single tax return. The tax returns can and must be unified while maintaining Quebec's taxation autonomy. These are not my words. These are their words. It is simple. There it is.

* * *

[*English*]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as parliamentarians, we are on the front lines of defending and safeguarding democracy. As representatives, we cherish our ability to speak out about human rights abuses. However, this is not the case in every country.

Today I am speaking out about the arbitrary detention of Senator Leila De Lima of the Philippines, who was jailed two years ago yesterday. Senator De Lima is the former chair of the Philippine Commission on Human Rights, former justice secretary, and was elected as a senator in 2016. Her arrest followed her outspoken criticism of the Philippines war on drugs, and her calls for congress to investigate the thousands of extrajudicial killings an other human rights violations.

The European Parliament has said that the charges against her were fabricated and has called for her release. Amnesty International regards her as a prisoner of conscience. In November, the UNHCR's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention called on Philippine authorities to immediately set her free.

I ask members to joining me in calling for the immediate release of Senator De Lima.

* * *

● (1400)

TAXATION

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister does not seem to know when to stop failing.

After figuring out that budgets do not balance themselves and abandoning any pretense of keeping his promise to balance one in our lifetime, the Prime Minister now says that low-income Canadians do not benefit from tax cuts. Maybe that is why he will never give them any.

As half of Canadians admit that they cannot stretch their household budget to the end of every month, we know that Canadians do not benefit from ever-increasing Liberal taxes. However, the Prime Minister is intent on making Canadians pay for his failures anyway. He never had to worry about money, so why expect that he will care about ours?

Struggling Canadians are being forced by this failing Prime Minister to pay more and take home less, with higher Liberal payroll taxes, and a carbon tax that increases the cost of their fuel, home heating and groceries. Rather than paying for Liberal failures, Canadians can choose a Conservative low-tax plan and Conservative leadership to get ahead.

Conservatives are fighting for better.

* * *

CANADA WINTER GAMES

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 2019 Canada Winter Games are officially under way in my hometown of Red Deer, Alberta until March 3, with over 3,600 athletes and coaches from coast to coast to coast competing in winter sport.

I would like to recognize the eight participants from my riding of Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam: Andrei Secu, a biathlon participant; curlers Hayato Sato and Joshua Miki; hockey players Matthew Seminoff and Thomas Milic; Ashley Robb, a ringette player; and speed skaters Noah Hyun and Sherilyn Chung.

[*Translation*]

I thank all the families and friends for always supporting these superb athletes.

[*English*]

This is their moment, and we are all cheering them on.

*Statements by Members***AT-RISK YOUTH SYMPOSIUM**

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on February 7 in Essex, I attended an at-risk youth human trafficking symposium, hosted by the Essex Ontario Provincial Police, with over 200 community service providers, in support of its recent community safety initiative, Project Gap.

I want to thank all who participated actively in this symposium. It was an important opportunity for many to learn what human trafficking looks like domestically in Canada. Listening to the courageous survivors tell their stories with no filter to educate us on their experiences was powerful and eye opening.

Human trafficking can happen to anyone and is rampant in Canada. Youth, largely girls and young women from all socio-economic backgrounds, are being targeted in small towns and cities alike as well as increasingly online. There are even videos and books being sold in our country that create a road map for aspiring sex traffickers or pimps. This is not acceptable.

Human trafficking is the fastest-growing criminal industry in the world, and we must do more to educate Canadians to recognize the signs of all who are being domestically trafficked. I want to thank the Essex OPP detachment, led by Inspector Glenn Miller, and Staff Sergeant Brad Sakalo, who are always going above and beyond to advocate for our local youth.

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[Translation]

SYLVAIN CLÉROUX GREENHOUSES

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on February 19, a massive blaze destroyed the greenhouses of Serres Sylvain Cléroux, a company in the riding of Laval—les Îles that is one of Quebec's largest flower producers.

Thanks to our first responders' heroic efforts, over one million square feet of spring seedlings were saved. I want to commend our police officers, paramedics and firefighters for doing such an incredible job of tackling the blaze in very harsh winter conditions.

I also want to wish the greenhouse owner, Sylvain Cléroux, and his employees the best of luck with the work ahead to rebuild this company, which is the pride of Laval's ornamental plant industry.

* * *

● (1405)

[English]

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, are we not all tired of paying for the Prime Minister's mistakes? I know I am. I know my constituents in Markham—Unionville are.

The Liberals are full of empty promises, like not raising taxes on Canadians. As usual, they have failed. We keep calling on the Prime Minister to once and for all commit to not raising any more taxes and no surprise, he just keeps spending and making Canadians pay for his mistakes.

The facts are clear. Canadians are paying more because of the government. Let us talk about how the job-killing carbon tax will

cost \$1,000 per household. What about his \$1.6 million tweet that rolled out the red carpet for almost 40,000 illegal border crossers into Canada, or the parents and grandparents program that was opened and shut within 10 minutes?

The government keeps spending and keeps breaking the rules. That is not what the Canadian government should do. It is not what the Canadian government will do in—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA WINTER GAMES

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have some good news from the Canada Winter Games, which are taking place in Red Deer, Alberta, until March 3.

The 12 athletes from Thérèse-De Blainville deserve to be recognized for their talent, perseverance and discipline. It has taken a lot of determination and sacrifice for these high-calibre athletes to achieve their dream and represent their community with such distinction. They can be sure that their community is proud of them.

Lorraine native Edouard Thériault won two gold medals and one silver medal in freestyle skiing. Émilie Villeneuve, who is also from Lorraine, took home gold with her synchronized skating team. Léa Tessier, who is from Blainville, won gold in the short track speed skating team relay. Fellow Blainville resident Gabrielle Deslauriers captured a gold medal and a bronze medal in artistic gymnastics.

The games are not over yet. Anything can happen, and we will keep dreaming with them. I congratulate these athletes for being an inspiration and setting a great example for everyone.

* * *

[English]

ENVER CREEK SECONDARY ROBOTICS TEAM

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a great accomplishment to report from my home riding of Fleetwood—Port Kells in Surrey. Enver Creek Secondary in Fleetwood sent its senior robotics team to the VEX competition held earlier this month in nearby Port Moody, where they topped the field of 25 teams to be ranked first in the world for their programming skills.

Robotics is a core talent at Enver Creek. Last week, its seniors qualified for the VEX World Championship on the strength of their robot skills score, which was 14th in the world out of 10,000.

Congratulations to all the kids and their coach, Reuben Heredia, for his outstanding accomplishment, one that has been built on skill and dedication. The students code and test for eight to 15 hours a week all on their own time.

Enver Creek and the crew are now getting ready for another round of competitions, this time representing Canada in Louisville, Kentucky. Congratulations, well done, and best of luck.

* * *

VETERANS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are many lessons that veterans can teach the youth of today. That is the premise of a new book by a 17-year-old constituent of mine, Emma Williamson.

Emma wrote the book to give the youth of today a better understanding of the sacrifices that veterans have made. The book is a collection of messages from veterans and current members of the 56th Field Artillery Regiment in Brantford.

None of these veterans and soldiers consider their sacrifice equal to those who have paid the ultimate price of war, but they deserve our recognition for having served honourably and for having been willing to put themselves in harm's way for our sake.

We owe Emma a debt of gratitude for writing this book and reminding us that their sacrifices shall never be ignored and their bravery never overlooked.

“At the going down of the sun and in the morning. We will remember them.” Lest we forget.

* * *

HOUSING

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I talk to my friends Karina, Steven and others living with disabilities, they tell me that the two most important issues to them are employment and housing.

I recently travelled to Israel with fellow MPs, the Reena Foundation, March of Dimes, Holland Bloorview rehabilitation hospital and others to learn more about its initiatives around inclusivity and accessibility. It is a pleasure to see some of those folks with us here today. Later today, there will be a reception to highlight the importance of supportive housing for those living with developmental disabilities.

I am proud of our government's commitment to ensure that those living with disabilities are supported through the national housing strategy. Over the next decade, we will invest \$40 billion to build stronger communities.

I want to say thanks to all those organizations that are working to ensure that the most vulnerable people in our communities have access to safe, accessible and inclusive housing.

* * *

• (1410)

[Translation]

LINDA LATOUR

Mr. Michel Picard (Montarville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to read a tribute written by students and staff at the Jardin-Bienville elementary school in Saint-Hubert for their principal, Linda Latour, as she approaches retirement:

Statements by Members

She cares about the well-being of students and staff of the school, and has made this school one big family in which everyone has a found a place to grow and thrive. She has created a nurturing environment in a beautiful brand new building, where judo classes have become quite popular. Ms. Latour is not afraid of hard work and has taken on all kinds of challenges, including moving mountains and moving schools. To her, nothing is impossible!

Thank you, Ms. Latour. Things will not be the same without you. As we bid you goodbye, we will keep smiles on our faces and happiness in our hearts.

* * *

[English]

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, February is Black History Month, when we celebrate the immense contributions of black Canadians. Black Canadians have overcome significant challenges. Some were brought to Canada as slaves prior to the abolition of slavery in Canada, in 1793. Some then came to Canada, escaping slavery through the Underground Railroad. Many have come more recently as immigrants, such as those who came to work in the steel plants in my home community of Whitney Pier, Cape Breton.

In the face of bigotry and discrimination, they have and continue to overcome. Together we must continue to fight racism. While much work has been done, there is more work to do.

As we honour the contributions of black Canadians, I would like to recognize the contribution of one in particular. Bruce Kyereh-Addo was a Conservative activist who campaigned for important causes in every part of the country. He worked as a staffer in Ottawa and in three provincial capitals.

Bruce died tragically and unexpectedly this past December at the age of 33. He was well known and much loved by our Conservative family from coast to coast.

This month, we recognize the contributions that he and so many other black Canadians have made to our politics, arts and culture, science and all aspects of Canadian society.

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MILITARY FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE IN WINNIPEG

Mr. Doug Eyolfson (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, I had the honour to attend the Military Family Resource Centre's annual yellow ribbon fundraising gala to celebrate and support the important work it is doing for military families in Winnipeg.

Winnipeg's Military Family Resource Centre is a pillar of our military community, providing resources, support and programming to military families, and making a difference in the lives of hundreds of men, women and children. Its hard work and dedication has helped build a community where families at 17 Wing are welcomed and supported.

I want to thank everyone who worked tirelessly to organize the successful fundraising gala. Their efforts help support the incredible work being done on behalf of families in our community.

Oral Questions

It is an honour to support this organization, and I thank it for everything it has done and will continue to do for our community.

* * *

[Translation]

SAINT-HYACINTHE—BAGOT

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the people of Saint-Hyacinthe and Acton Vale are very involved in their community. They are selfless with their time and energy. I would like to acknowledge the contributions of some of these remarkable people from all walks of life, who are dedicated to improving community life.

We have many volunteers, but I would like to highlight the outstanding contributions of the following people: Micheline Bienvenue and Denis Hinse of the Optimist Club; Lynda Chambers and Denise Joyal of Harmonie vocale; Mélanie Lagacé, who is involved in agriculture; Céline Lussier-Cadieux of the Bois-des-Douze nature reserve; Claude Marchesseault, a Saint-Hyacinthe community builder; Rosaire Martin, who is involved in all municipal affairs; Claude Millette, a world-renowned visual artist; Robert Pinsonneault of the Orchestre philharmonique de Saint-Hyacinthe; as well as Micheline Healy, Richard Standish, Jacques Tétreault and Annabelle Palardy, who work to protect and defend our environment.

Their involvement keeps our community's tradition of caring and support alive, and I thank them for it.

* * *

[English]

FINANCE

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised Canadians that 2019 would be the year that he finally balanced the budget. It is no surprise that the Prime Minister has failed and he has no plan and no intention of balancing the budget ever.

The Liberals have blown the budget and Canadians are paying for it. Soon the Prime Minister will bring in his fourth consecutive deficit.

Permanent Liberal deficits mean that taxes will go up again, and at a time when Canadians simply cannot afford it. According to a recent survey, half of Canadians are barely getting by each month when they should be getting ahead.

Instead of paying for costly Liberal failures, Canadians should keep more of their money that they earn. The Conservatives offer Canadians a better choice in 2019: a Conservative government that will balance budgets and lower taxes to create well-paying jobs that help Canadians get ahead.

* * *

• (1415)

ACADEMY AWARDS

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to congratulate Domee Shi on winning her

first Oscar for her animated short film *Bao* last night at the 91st Annual Academy Awards. Ms. Shi wrote and directed this Pixar production about a Chinese Canadian woman whose dumpling miraculously comes to life. It is delightful.

Born in China, she moved to Toronto with her family at the age of two. Her eight-minute film is set in Toronto and features many of our city's landmarks. Ms. Shi used her upbringing and love of food as inspiration for *Bao*, which has played in theatres with *Incredibles 2*.

A graduate of the animation program at Ontario's world-renowned Sheridan College, Domee Shi is the first woman to direct a short film in Pixar. In her acceptance speech she said, "To all of the nerdy girls out there who hide behind their sketchbooks — don't be afraid to tell your stories to the world."

On behalf of all Canadians, please join me in congratulating Domee Shi for her extraordinary work in telling her story.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on February 7, the Prime Minister stated that The Globe and Mail report about how he pressured the former attorney general on the SNC-Lavalin case was "false".

On Thursday, we learned from the Clerk of the Privy Council that there was in fact a concerted effort to interfere in the case against SNC-Lavalin by seeking to influence the then attorney general.

Can the Prime Minister tell us which version of the story is true?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think it is a good thing that we take seriously our responsibility to stand up for jobs and grow the economy. That is what we will continue to do, in a way that respects our institutions and the independence of our judiciary.

Those are the responsibilities that we have accepted from the very beginning, and that is the work we are doing to create economic growth for all Canadians while defending our institutions, which are so important for our democracy.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, he cannot provide simple, straightforward answers.

Contrary to the Prime Minister's assertions, the report is true. He met with the Clerk of the Privy Council at noon on December 19. Immediately afterward, the clerk called the former attorney general to inform her that the Prime Minister was quite anxious.

When the Prime Minister ordered the clerk to call the former attorney general, what did he tell him?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have consistently done what we have always promised Canadians we would do, which is to stand up for good jobs and create economic growth while upholding the integrity and independence of our judicial system and respect for our institutions.

That is what this government has always done, and that is what this government will continue to do.

[*English*]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has finally found a line that it seems like he might stick with for more than a day. His story has changed nearly every single day since this scandal first broke, and Canadians deserve answers.

The Prime Minister first said that the allegations contained in The Globe and Mail story were false, that no direction or even pressure was applied on the former attorney general. Now we find out from the Clerk of the Privy Council that the Prime Minister's fingerprints are all over this sleazy affair to let his friends off the hook.

Once again, if the decision was the former attorney general's and hers alone to make, why did the Prime Minister try so often to get her to change her mind?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said from the very beginning, we have consistently and continually stood up for the close to 9,000 jobs at SNC-Lavalin, indeed, good jobs right across the country. That is what Canadians expect of this government, to stick up for jobs, to create new ones and to make sure we grow our economy in ways that benefit everyone.

That is exactly what we will continue to do and we will continue to do it in a way that respects the independence of our judiciary, that respects the integrity of our judicial systems and always respects the rules and norms that govern our institutions.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, whatever the justification the Prime Minister is going to try to use, he needs to remember one thing: interfering in a criminal court case is always wrong.

The Prime Minister thinks he is above the law, that he can use his power to get his well-connected friends off the hook. That is not the way Canada works.

If the decision was the former attorney general's to make and hers alone, then why did the Prime Minister continually apply pressure to get her to change her mind?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, the member opposite demonstrates that he does not quite understand what he is talking about.

We always take seriously our responsibilities, standing up for jobs and growing the economy. The justice department's official backgrounder on remediation agreements states two of the main purposes for remediation agreements: one, to hold the organization accountable for wrongdoing; and, two, reduce the harm that a criminal conviction of an organization could have for employees, share-

holders and other third parties that did not take part in the event. That is what is in the law.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister does not seem to understand that it is not the Prime Minister's role to direct prosecutors and judges to give special deals to their friends.

The independent Crown prosecutor determined that SNC-Lavalin did not qualify. The former attorney general seems to have made up her mind that it did not qualify. That is when the Prime Minister and his office went to work with unwanted, coordinated and sustained pressure to force the former attorney general to let his well-connected friends off the hook.

If the Prime Minister is so sure that he did nothing wrong, will he appear before the justice committee to explain his actions?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will consistently stand up for hard-working Canadians right across the country and be not the least bit apologetic about standing up for good jobs, wherever they are, across the country.

I am pleased also to confirm that later today the government will confirm that the member for Vancouver Granville will be able to address relevant matters at the committee, while ensuring the two active court cases are not jeopardized.

We of course continue to welcome the studies by the Ethics Commissioner and the parliamentary committee.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has told Canadians to "heed very carefully" the words of Privy Council clerk Michael Wernick.

Last week, that clerk said, "I do not see where the former Attorney General was a solicitor. The matter was never discussed at cabinet...So she was not giving advice to cabinet. She was not advising the Prime Minister." Therefore, he concluded that solicitor-client privilege did not even apply here.

Since the Prime Minister has said we should heed the clerk, I have a simple question. Will he allow the former attorney general to speak her truth?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, later today the government will confirm the member can address relevant matters at the committee, while ensuring of course that the two active court cases are not jeopardized. We continue to welcome the studies by the committee and the Ethics Commissioner.

Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 4, SNC was told there was no deal. On September 17, the Prime Minister and Privy Council clerk met with the former attorney general to discuss SNC. On December 5, the Prime Minister's top staffer, Gerry Butts, met with her to discuss it. On December 18, the Prime Minister's two top staffers met with her chief of staff to discuss it. On December 19, the Privy Council clerk called her to discuss it. On January 14, the former attorney general was fired from her role.

Oral Questions

How can Canadians, who are reviewing these facts, not conclude there was relentless pressure to have her change her mind?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the Clerk of the Privy Council confirmed “At every opportunity, verbally and in writing in December, the Prime Minister made it clear that this was the decision for the Minister of Justice to take.”

We will consistently, and regularly, stand up for jobs across the country, and will do so in a way that respects the independence of our judiciary and the integrity of our institutions.

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after changing his story every day for nearly three weeks now, the Prime Minister spent the weekend telling people they should listen to the Clerk of the Privy Council.

The Clerk of the Privy Council said very clearly that, in his opinion, solicitor-client privilege and cabinet privilege do not apply to the former attorney general.

Will the Prime Minister listen to the clerk and allow the former attorney general to tell Canadians the truth?

Will he finally allow her to speak her truth?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker. Later today the government will confirm the member can address relevant matters at the committee, while ensuring that the two active court cases are not jeopardized.

We continue to welcome the studies by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the key words are “relevant matter”.

This is not the first time the Liberals have rewritten our laws to suit their friends, but this time they are truly pulling out all the stops.

Not only did the Liberals change the Criminal Code to help SNC-Lavalin executives, but once the former attorney general said no, they decided to also change our procurement systems to help SNC-Lavalin.

When their rich friends ask for help, the Liberals leap to their aid, but when it comes to ordinary Canadians, the Liberals tell them to wait.

When will the Liberals tell the truth and show some transparency?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, that is exactly what we are doing.

We will stand up for good jobs, including jobs at SNC-Lavalin across the country, for the nearly 10,000 Canadians who work there.

As far as remediation agreements are concerned, the Department of Justice's official background document confirms that there are two purposes for such agreements: to hold the organization accountable for the wrongdoing; and, importantly, to reduce harm that a criminal conviction of an organization could have for employees, shareholders and other third parties who did not take part—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

[*English*]

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is a very simple and easy question for the Prime Minister to answer.

On December 5, the Prime Minister's principal secretary met with the former attorney general in the bar at the Château Laurier. It appears that the purpose of that meeting was to put even more pressure on the former attorney general to change her mind and to allow a special deal to be made over the objections of independent Crown prosecutors.

Was the Prime Minister aware that his principal secretary was meeting with the former attorney general on December 5?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that the record show that the director of the Public Prosecution Service confirmed that prosecutors in every case “exercise their discretion independently and free from any political or partisan consideration.”

It is also important to note that the matter is being looked at by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner as well as the justice committee. The justice committee has members from both sides present. They are working together to ensure that witnesses are appearing. Witnesses are being called and are answering tough questions from members of Parliament on both sides. I am not sure why the member is undermining that work.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister cannot answer these questions, perhaps the government House leader can answer the question.

If she has so much faith in the justice committee now that it is finally starting to allow witnesses to appear, even though originally it seems her office directed the committee members not to allow that to happen—if she has so much confidence and faith in the justice committee's work, will Liberal members be supporting this motion before the House today to force the Prime Minister to attend and explain his actions?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important that the record show that it was actually this government under the leadership of this Prime Minister that increased resources to committees.

The record should also show that it was that member's party that put out a rule book that would undermine the work of committees. They had no respect for committees over 10 years of Stephen Harper.

What is clear is that the Conservatives have chosen—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1430)

The Speaker: Order. I would ask the hon. members for Chilliwack—Hope and Barrie—Innisfil not to interrupt when someone else has the floor. Each side will get its turn.

The hon. government House leader has the floor.

Oral Questions

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that under 10 years of Stephen Harper, they had no respect for committees. The Conservatives have chosen a new leader, but it remains a party of Stephen Harper that has no regard for committees, and the Conservatives continue to undermine their work. We on this side know that Canadians should have confidence in their decisions. We will let the committees do their important work.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on September 4, the director of public prosecutions decided that SNC-Lavalin was not entitled to a remediation agreement, and the blitz to try to influence the former attorney general began. The Prime Minister tried to influence her at a meeting on September 17, and his top adviser and friend followed suit on December 5. Many others in the Prime Minister's inner circle also tried the same trick.

Did the Prime Minister clearly try to influence the former attorney general?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member continues to make claims, but let us look at the facts. The director of the Public Prosecution Service confirmed that prosecutors in every case exercise their discretion independently. The Clerk of the Privy Council also confirmed that at every opportunity, the Prime Minister made it clear that this was the decision for the former Minister of Justice to take.

On this side of the House, we respect the work of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. We know that the members are capable of doing their job, and we have confidence in their work.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, right now, the government is changing its story day by day, getting up to all kinds of monkey business in an attempt to influence our justice system. The director of public prosecutions made her decision on September 4. She confirmed that decision on October 9. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister and his cronies repeatedly tried to get her to change her mind.

We want to know whether the Prime Minister will agree to appear before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to answer all of the opposition's questions.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the director of public prosecutions confirmed that prosecutors in every case exercise their discretion independently.

The Conservatives keep talking out of both sides of their mouths. In French, they claim they would not dream of hurting the employees of SNC-Lavalin, as the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles says. However, in English, it is a different story, as we heard from the member for Carleton, who is not hiding the fact that he wants to shut this company down. The Conservatives need to stop their doublespeak and start being clear with Canadians.

[*English*]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on December 5, Gerry Butts met with the former attorney general to discuss the SNC-Lavalin matter. On December 6, the Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister himself wrote a letter to SNC-Lavalin, refusing to

meet with SNC-Lavalin anymore and directing SNC-Lavalin to the Attorney General's office.

I would like to know what happened between December 5 and December 6 that caused the Prime Minister to make that decision.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is important to note is that the justice committee has members from all parties recognized in this House. They are working together to have witnesses appear. Witnesses are answering tough questions.

However, it is also important to note that the Conservative leader met with representatives of the company and the NDP leader met with representatives of the company. The Conservative deputy leader herself, who just asked the question, said at the justice committee, "I do not want the impression to be on the record that I think there is anything wrong with meeting with SNC-Lavalin...."

At the justice committee, the Clerk of the Privy Council also confirmed that at every opportunity, verbally and in writing, in December, the Prime Minister—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Milton.

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Milton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, only the Prime Minister can answer these questions, and that is why we are asking him to appear before the justice committee.

The second question I would like to ask is this. Between September 4 and October 10, did the Prime Minister or anyone in the Prime Minister's Office or the Clerk of the Privy Council give assurances to SNC-Lavalin that they would overturn the decision of the former attorney general?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that that member of the Conservative Party continues to undermine the work of the justice committee as well as the work of the commissioner. The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is looking at this matter. The justice committee is looking at this matter. We are the government that increased resources.

Let the record show that on this side we respect the work of committees, we respect the work of officers of Parliament and we respect the independence of the judicial system. That is a clear contrast from what the Conservatives stand for.

* * *

● (1435)

[*Translation*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are suffering the consequences of climate change and paying the price for the Liberal government's half measures.

Oral Questions

Last week, the National Energy Board once again recommended that the government move forward with the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion. We know what is coming next. The Liberals are going to hide behind the NEB to justify their bad decision regarding the Trans Mountain pipeline and their failure to protect the environment as they should.

How can Quebeckers trust the Liberals not to do the same in the case of energy east?

[English]

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that we campaigned in the last election on a commitment to protect our environment and grow the economy at the same time. That includes steps that are going to get our resources to new markets so that our provinces in the western part of our country do not take a haircut on their resources.

However, I want to highlight for the member that we are moving forward with a number of measures, including over 50 to contribute to the fight against climate change. We are putting a price on pollution. We are making the largest investment in the history of public transit in Canada. By 2030, 90% of our electricity will be generated from clean resources.

We are in a new age in Canadian politics when it comes to protecting our environment. I invite the NDP to join the train.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has claimed that climate change is the fight of his life. He has claimed that there is no relationship more important to him than that with indigenous peoples and he has claimed that he really, really cares about protecting our west coast.

When the National Energy Board said that the Trans Mountain pipeline will, one, have major impacts on our climate; two, significantly damage indigenous rights and title; and three, potentially wipe out the southern resident killer whale population, it seems like this decision would be a no-brainer.

This is a test for the Prime Minister. Between the principles he claims to hold and a pipeline he so desperately wants to build, what is it going to be?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are following the clear guidelines that have been given to us by the Federal Court of Appeal. We instructed the National Energy Board to undertake this review, and they have given us that report on Friday. We will carefully analyze and look at it.

At the same time, we are moving forward with meaningful consultation with indigenous communities to understand their concerns and offer accommodation and work with them to find solutions to the outstanding issues.

* * *

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister conspired to halt the criminal trial of a corporation accused of corruption.

My question has to do with the December 18 meeting between the PMO and the office of the former attorney general. We know that Gerald Butts and Katie Telford spoke on behalf of the Prime Minister. We also know that they, along with the Prime Minister, have all the power in the Liberal government.

Canadians want to know why the Prime Minister asked those two individuals to meet with the chief of staff to the former attorney general on December 18.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights are doing their job.

Our government increased resources to committees so that they could do this important work. The clerk told the committee last week that the Prime Minister made it clear that this was a decision for the justice minister to make.

Although this member claims to have no intention of hurting SNC-Lavalin employees, the member for Carleton said something altogether different.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member can accuse me, but the one thing we Conservatives want is the truth, her truth.

The Prime Minister changed his story every day for two weeks. No two versions have been the same. On top of that, he has given himself the right to speak on behalf of the former attorney general.

Will the former attorney general be allowed to speak freely at this much-touted committee?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will repeat what the Prime Minister just said. Later today the government will confirm that the member will be able to address relevant matters at the committee, while ensuring that the two active court cases are not jeopardized. We continue to welcome the studies by the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister cannot seem to take no for an answer. When the former attorney general said that, no, she was not going to give SNC-Lavalin a deal, he was not happy, so he sent in his two top people, Telford and Butts, the two people who spoke directly for him, to do some persuading.

On December 18, they meet with the chief of staff to the then attorney general to discuss the SNC-Lavalin deal. What did Telford and Butts say at that meeting, and what did they threaten would happen if SNC-Lavalin did not get the deal?

● (1440)

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member continues to confirm that the Conservatives will speculate rather than look at the facts.

Oral Questions

We on this side have respect for the justice committee and we have respect for the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner because they are doing their important work. We know that both the justice committee and the commissioner are looking at this file. We will not undermine the work of the justice committee. We on this side will not undermine the work of officers of Parliament. We on this side will not undermine the independence of the judicial system, as the Conservatives continue to do.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know the Prime Minister sent in his highest-ranking people, who speak on his behalf, to pressure and persuade the former attorney general through her chief of staff. Canadians deserve to know what kind of pressure was applied to their attorney general. The only person who knows is the Prime Minister, and the buck stops with him. Therefore, will he come to the justice committee? Will he finally stop evading and answer some questions truthfully and openly?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about what we know. We know that the Conservative leader met with representatives of the company. We know that the leader of the NDP met with representatives of the company. We know that the Conservative deputy leader herself said at the justice committee, “I do not want the impression to be on the record that I think there is anything wrong with meeting with SNC-Lavalin”.

We also know that the Clerk of the Privy Council confirmed, “At every opportunity, verbally and in writing in December, the Prime Minister made it clear that this was the decision for the Minister of Justice to take.”

We on this side will continue to respect the independence of the judicial system and the rule of law.

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[Translation]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what a milestone. The Phoenix fiasco began three years ago, and the Liberal government still has yet to find a solution.

Public servants have been living this nightmare for three years, and the government refuses to say when this fiasco will be fixed. An internal government memo says it could take 10 years. Public servants continue to provide services every day, and they are still having problems getting paid properly.

The government has turned its back on these families. Public servants must get the money they are owed immediately.

When will the Liberals fix this, once and for all?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I completely agree that Canada's public servants deserve to be paid on time and accurately for the important work they do. More than 160,000 cases have been cleared from the backlog since January 2018, and we are working very hard to accelerate the progress being made every month.

We continue doing this important work. We will not stop until this is fixed.

[English]

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it has been three years since the ill-fated Phoenix rollout and we are still hearing the same answers we heard three years ago when the whole thing started. It is a shame. Federal workers have lost homes and have had strain put on their families. Even some simple things would help, like changing the law so that they do not have to pay back the gross pay on the net pay that they received.

When SNC-Lavalin wanted legal changes to get out of criminal charges, that got done. In fact, they rolled out the red carpet. Why should workers continue to have their lives put on hold while the government is distracted protecting its well-connected buddies?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Public Services and Procurement and Accessibility, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, since January 2018, the backlog has gone down by 160,000 cases. We are doing whatever we possibly can to make sure our public servants are paid on time and accurately.

In May of this year, all the departments will be serviced by pay pods. Employees are satisfied by this movement. It was an employee-generated idea.

This will be resolved. We will stabilize the system. Yes, it is taking longer than we wish, but rest assured, this is my number one priority.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians living with disabilities face unique challenges when it comes to finding accessible, affordable housing. In my riding of Cambridge, there has been significant investment in projects targeted to help, like the new accessible, affordable housing at 175 Hespeler Road.

Could the minister responsible for housing tell the House how Canada's national housing strategy is helping people living with disabilities find places to call home that meet their unique needs?

• (1445)

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Cambridge for highlighting the challenges that people with disabilities in Canada face when it comes to finding an accessible home.

That is why we launched the first-ever national housing strategy a year ago. That is why the national co-investment fund requires 25% of the newly constructed or repaired units to be fully accessible. That is why we will continue to fight very hard so that every Canadian with a disability has access to a safe, affordable and accessible home.

*Oral Questions***JUSTICE**

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Michael Wernick testified that on December 19, he met with the Prime Minister and immediately following this meeting he picked up the phone and called the former attorney general to check in on the SNC-Lavalin matter.

What instructions did the Prime Minister provide Wernick to initiate this call?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, we on this side respect the work of the justice committee. We on this side have increased resources for all committees, because we know that they do important work. We on this side will also defend and uphold the principles of judicial independence as well as the rule of law. We know that the matter is being looked at by the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner and the justice committee. We also know that we on this side will fully co-operate with these two investigations, because they are doing important work.

What is clear is that the member of the Conservative Party continues to undermine their work. We will not do that on this side. Canadians have confidence in their institutions.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister conspired to stop the criminal trial of a company charged with bribery. Canadians deserve transparency. Canadians deserve answers about the Prime Minister's involvement in this sordid affair.

Again, what did the Prime Minister say to Wernick that prompted him to pick up the phone and call the former attorney general to check in on the SNC-Lavalin matter? What did he say?

The Speaker: I must remind the hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton to be judicious in his choice of words.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that member just confirmed that the Conservative Party and its members will continue to speculate rather than look at the facts. That is something Canadians know very well and that is exactly why they are sitting on the opposition benches. That is the party that chose to undermine committees. They put out a rule book to make sure that they could undermine and destroy the work of committees.

We on this side will not do that. We are the government that increased resources to committees. We know that they do important work. We know that members on both sides are asking witnesses to appear and we know that witnesses are answering. Let them do their work.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that Michael Wernick spoke to the former attorney general on the afternoon of December 19. He said he called her about the SNC-Lavalin file. Wernick also said the former attorney general advised the Prime Minister on September 17 that she was not going to intervene.

Why did the Prime Minister instruct the clerk to make the phone call if she had already made up her mind?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is speculation.

We know very well that the Clerk of the Privy Council confirmed when he was at the justice committee last week that at every opportunity, verbally and in writing, in December, the Prime Minister made it clear that this was a decision for the Minister of Justice to take.

There are members of Parliament on both sides of the aisle that sit on the justice committee. They are working together to have witnesses appear. Witnesses are appearing and answering tough questions.

We, on this side, know that Canadians should have confidence in their institutions. We will not undermine that work because we know the committee is working hard. The Conservatives should stop their doublespeak.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): It certainly is not speculation, Mr. Speaker, because those were Wernick's words.

Canadians need to know what is not being said by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister conspired to stop the criminal trial of a company charged with bribery. It is clear that there was a concerted and sustained effort by the Prime Minister and his senior operatives to make the former attorney general change her mind.

If we are not going to get answers in this place, will the Prime Minister appear before the justice committee and finally tell the truth?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I will continue to say, members of the justice committee from both sides of the House are working together. They are asking witnesses to appear. Witnesses are appearing and they are responding to questions.

We, on this side, will always have confidence in our committee system. It is important work that they do. The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is also looking at this file. We, on this side, will not undermine that work.

That is a clear contrast between the Conservatives and the Liberals. We will not undermine committees. We will not undermine officers of Parliament. We will not undermine the independence of the justice system.

* * *

● (1450)

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is now clear that Liberals have given up on GM workers and their families in Oshawa without even trying.

Do members know what the government did in the U.S.? U.S. representatives fought and succeeded in pressuring GM to extend the operation of the Detroit-Hamtramck plant for the life of the current collective agreement. That is the bare minimum that workers in Oshawa have been asking for and the Liberals did not even try to secure that with GM. Canadian workers deserve better than this. Layoffs start in two weeks.

Oral Questions

Why will the Prime Minister not fight for their jobs?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we fight day in and day out for our auto workers.

Since 2015, we have seen historic investments of \$6 billion in the automotive sector because our Prime Minister has made the automotive sector a priority for our government. We have seen significant investments in the auto supply sector, and this has resulted in thousands of jobs being created.

Compare that with the Conservatives. For the first three years of their mandate, they lost 50,000 jobs in the automotive sector and 20,000 before the recession even hit. We have seen thousands of jobs created since 2015. We will continue to fight for the auto worker.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last month the NDP secured a request to have General Motors CEO Mary Barra appear before committee to answer questions on the closure of the Oshawa plant. Instead, the Liberals cut a private deal to excuse her and now we get a lobbyist, and this is because the Prime Minister could not even get his own meeting. So much for not interfering with committees. Meanwhile, U.S. political pressure gets a new deal to extend plant operations and now Canada is left out in the cold. Why are the Liberals letting CEO Barra off the hook?

Would the Prime Minister care to explain to Canadians his failures for Oshawa versus the workers of Detroit-Hamtramck, who are getting a new life on their jobs?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I went to Detroit and met with Mary Barra just a few weeks ago and I made it very clear that they are making a big mistake by leaving Oshawa.

We as a government will not make that mistake and turn our backs on auto workers. We will continue to defend auto workers. We have been very clear, with Jerry Dias's involvement when it comes to Unifor that for any solution that it has between the unions and GM, we will be at the table as part of the solution. We will continue to defend auto workers and we will continue to invest in this very important sector.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said that Canadians should listen to the Clerk of the Privy Council. During his appearance at committee, the clerk said that cabinet never discussed SNC-Lavalin. However, the Minister of National Revenue said during a radio interview that the decision regarding SNC was made at cabinet.

I have a simple question. Who is telling the truth?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are members of Parliament on both sides of the aisle that sit on the justice committee.

That member, very new to this place, should also know that those members have come together to ask for a list of witnesses. It is also important to know that witnesses are appearing at the justice

committee. Members of Parliament from both sides are asking tough questions. Witnesses are answering those questions.

That member also knows that the Conservatives had a rule book to undermine committees. We have not done such a thing. We have actually increased resources to committees to ensure that committees can do their important work and Canadians can have confidence in their institutions.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was interesting and all, but it had absolutely nothing to do with the question.

The issue is this: last week, Canada's top bureaucrat testified that the Liberal scandal was never ever discussed in cabinet. That is what the top bureaucrat said last week, but two weeks ago, the Minister of National Revenue said on the radio that it had indeed been discussed in cabinet, and three weeks ago, when the scandal broke, the Prime Minister said nobody could talk about it because of cabinet confidence.

Which government member is telling the truth?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our answers were indeed relevant.

What I said was that members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights asked questions.

They asked for witnesses. The witnesses are appearing. We know members are asking these questions. That is what I am saying. We need to have confidence in the members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

Those of us on this side of the House have confidence in them, but apparently the Conservatives do not.

● (1455)

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is true that just a few days ago, Liberal MPs described getting the former attorney general to testify at parliamentary committee as a witch hunt, a fishing expedition and a distraction.

However, if the minister and the Liberal government are so open to hearing from everyone at committee, will they allow the Prime Minister to have his say?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we said, we respect the work of the committees. We have confidence in the work of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and all the other committees. We will allow them to do their work, because we respect their work.

We can see the Conservatives feel differently.

Oral Questions

[English]

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no more important job than to care for our loved ones. We welcome caregivers to Canada every year, mainly from the Philippines, to care for our children and our parents. However, as they care for our families they leave their own behind, often enduring a painful separation of years before they can be reunited. I have met these caregivers and heard their stories. Canada needs to do better.

Could the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship tell us what the government is doing to reunite caregiver families?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her tireless advocacy on behalf of caregivers.

Thousands of families rely on caregivers to care for their loved ones. Caregivers have often faced too many barriers to reuniting with their own families. Our government is introducing a program that will provide a faster path for permanent residency, better protections against abuse, and for the first time, we will allow caregivers to bring their own spouses and children with them.

Our government has eliminated the caregiver backlog left behind by the Conservatives, from five years to 12 months. We will always stand for family reunification.

* * *

JUSTICE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after the Prime Minister moved the former attorney general out of her position, she wrote a letter to the public saying that she had spoken “truth to power”. She rose recently and said that she would like to speak her truth to all Canadians.

So far, the Prime Minister has been silencing her, invoking solicitor-client privilege, real or imagined. Today, he says that he will finally allow her to speak, but only to say things that he considers relevant.

Will the Prime Minister remove these obstacles to the former attorney general's free speech and let her speak?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I confirm what the Prime Minister said earlier today in question period, that the member will be able to address relevant matters in front of the committee while ensuring that the two active court cases are not jeopardized.

We continue to welcome the work of the justice committee, as well as that of the Ethics Commissioner.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals do not support the RCMP and community safety programs, people and communities suffer.

In Pelican Narrows, the community safety officer program is responsible for recruiting and training officers to do nightly patrols,

but they lack the resources to bring in the talent they need. People's safety should be a priority, yet the Liberal government is failing to act.

When will the Liberals commit to the safety of people in northern Saskatchewan and dedicate funding for their community safety programs?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have met with representatives of a variety of communities across the country about community safety initiatives, including special constables and other forms of augmenting regular police service. I am certainly happy to meet with any community in the hon. member's riding if people have concerns they wish to pursue.

However, I would note that for the first nations policing program, we have just made the largest investment in Canadian history to try to bring better policing services to indigenous communities across the country.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Mike Bossio (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, climate change is real and the cost of inaction is enormous. It is disappointing that while climate change is having a real impact on the health and well-being of Canadians, Conservative politicians are wasting millions of taxpayer dollars fighting climate action in court. Meanwhile, the party opposite still has no plan to protect the environment.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment please update the House on the actions our government is taking to fight climate change while growing our economy?

● (1500)

Mr. Sean Fraser (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his hard work and tireless advocacy to help protect our climate.

Economists are virtually unanimous that the best thing we can be doing to transition to a low-carbon economy is to put a price on pollution that will bring emissions down and put more money in the pockets of Canadian families. However, it is only one of 50 measures that we are taking to fight climate change, along with phasing out coal, so we can get to 90% generation of our electricity by clean sources by 2030. We are improving public transit, with the largest investment in the history of Canada. We are investing in energy efficiency, clean technologies and green infrastructure.

While some Conservatives want to oppose meaningful action on climate change, like Doug Ford and the leader of the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Carleton.

JUSTICE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been speaking widely about the SNC-Lavalin affair, telling his side of the story, not concerned at all about court proceedings, privilege or cabinet confidence. Apparently that does not matter when he is telling his side of the story. However, now he is saying that he is going to constrain his former attorney general's testimony by limiting it to what he considers to be relevant matters.

Could he confirm if relevant matters will include all communications between his office and the former attorney general?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, later today the government will confirm that the member can address relevant matters at the committee, while ensuring that two active court cases are not jeopardized. We will continue to work with the studies by the justice committee and the Ethics Commissioner.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, everyone here agrees that the former SNC-Lavalin executives who committed crimes must be brought to justice. However, it seems like everyone here also thinks that thousands of workers should pay for crimes committed by a handful of individuals. SNC-Lavalin has lost \$1.6 billion since this crisis started. Next, it will be cutting jobs or having a fire sale and opening itself up to a foreign takeover.

Will the Attorney General finally take over this case?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times in the House, this is a complex matter. There are two ongoing court cases. I cannot comment on this.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the answer is always the same: "no comment".

The government's primary responsibility is to protect the people. It is disgusting to see the opposition parties bashing SNC-Lavalin workers, who have done nothing wrong. This affects them. They are going to pay the price come the election. The Attorney General is responsible for this matter. He has the power to take over the SNC-Lavalin case at any time and to negotiate a remediation agreement to ensure that the guilty are punished, not thousands of workers.

When will he take over this case?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Attorney General of Canada, I cannot interfere in matters currently before the courts. It would be highly inappropriate for me to comment.

* * *

[English]

FINANCE

Mr. Raj Grewal (Brampton East, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, many young Canadians dream of home ownership, yet that dream is becoming more difficult every day. Many residents are concerned that the mortgage stress test has made home ownership for the first time extremely difficult and has contributed to a slowdown in the housing market.

Oral Questions

Will the finance minister please update the House on what measures the government is exploring to help Canadians become homeowners?

Hon. Bill Morneau (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to say that we have been very focused on ensuring that our housing market is effective so Canadians can not only recognize that their investment in their home is stable, but also so they can have an aspiration to acquiring a home for them and their families.

Over the last three years, we have put in measures for affordable housing across our country. We have put in measures to make sure people are protected. We will continue to think about how we can ensure that middle-class Canadians have the possibility to raise their families and have home ownership as part of that dream.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I request unanimous consent for the following motion: Recognizing that 2019 marks the 10th anniversary of the end of armed conflict in Sri Lanka and honouring the tens of thousands of lives lost and countless victims displaced during this 26-year war; and recognizing further that the Government of Sri Lanka has made insufficient progress in implementing its commitments on reconciliation, accountability and transitional justice and that frustrations persist among those seeking to heal the wounds of all those who have suffered; therefore, the House of Commons calls on the Government of Sri Lanka to fully implement its obligations under the Human Rights Council resolution 30/1 and to set a clear timeline bound strategy for ensuring a process of accountability that has the trust and confidence of the victims, including the families of those who have disappeared.

● (1505)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Speaker, on that point of order, I was pleased to support the initiative just read out by my colleague. It is interesting it came from him. However, I want to read out a slightly different resolution and maybe this will have the full support of the House: That the House call on the Government of Canada to strongly push for the full implementation of Human Rights Council resolution 30/1 within a clearly-specified time frame; call on the Government of Sri Lanka to implement resolution 30/1 within a clearly specified time frame, recognizing the resolution was co-sponsored by the Government of Sri Lanka; and invites the Minister of International Development to table a report in the House at her earliest convenience explaining development projects funded in Sri Lanka and their impact on the implementation of resolution 30/1 and on peace and reconciliation in general.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

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

*[English]***GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS**

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

* * *

*[Translation]***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 25th report of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights concerning Bill C-84, an act to amend the Criminal Code in regard to bestiality and animal fighting.

[English]

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House with amendments.

* * *

CANADA PENSION PLAN INVESTMENT BOARD ACT

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-431, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board Act (investments).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased and honoured to rise in the House today to introduce my private member's bill, which would amend the investment policies, standards and procedures of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board to ensure that no CPP funds would be invested in any entity that performed acts or carried out work contrary to ethical business practices or committed human, labour or environmental rights violations.

The Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, which oversees the \$368-billion CPP fund, was set up by an act of Parliament in 1997 and is mandated to invest in the best interests of CPP contributors and beneficiaries by maximizing returns without undue risk of loss. It is important to note that my bill would not change this mandate.

Despite its adherence to a policy on responsible investing, the CPPIB has billions of dollars in direct private investments in the oil and gas sector and was recently found to have increased holdings in two private U.S. companies that run American prisons. The CPPIB has also been found to have significant holdings in various arms manufacturing industries and has previously invested in companies implicated in human rights abuses.

The Canada pension plan is an important part of our country's retirement system, but Canadians expect its investments are carried out with certain principles in mind. By amending section 35 of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board Act to specify ethical practices in human, labour and environmental rights considerations, Bill C-431 would do just that.

* * *

•(1510)

PETITIONS

VISION CARE

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table once again a petition for a national framework for action to promote eye health and vision care. As members know, many of these petitions have been tabled in the House. There is a growing concern about vision loss. It is expected that it will double in the next 20 years. Just 1% of the total expenditure on vision loss is invested in post vision loss rehabilitation therapy.

There are other points being raised in this petition. The petitioners are also asking the government to commit to acknowledging eye health and vision care as a growing public health issue and to respond to it, particularly with Canada's vulnerable population, including children, seniors, diabetic people and indigenous peoples, through the development of a national framework for action to promote eye health and vision care.

JUSTICE

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to table a petition by residents from Saskatoon as well as Biggar and Harris, calling on the Minister of Justice to eliminate the maximum sentence for sexual assault crimes, and increase the minimum sentences for sexual assault crimes and sexual crimes committed toward a minor. Further, the petitioners call on the Minister of Justice to, among other things, establish a national registry for sexual offenders as well as those convicted of other violent crimes.

FIREARMS

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by Canadians from the ridings of St. Catharines, Niagara Centre and Bay of Quinte. They call on the House of Commons to respect the rights of law-abiding firearms owners and reject the Prime Minister's plan to waste taxpayer's money studying a ban on guns that are already banned.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition from residents from across Ontario. They are saying to this place that despite being victimized many times over in imposed conflict strategies of war, women bear a lot of the impacts and yet they have great potential for providing support in building peace and security.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS***[English]***BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**

OPPOSITION MOTION—STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise and address the chamber.

I will move specifically to a couple of quotes, because I think they are really important in terms of the context of what has been taking place over the last few weeks.

I would ultimately argue that what we have before us is in fact an opposition that has become united. It is not the first time that the NDP and the Conservatives have decided to join forces to see what they can do. This is not necessarily about a policy issue per se, but rather about pointing fingers and character assassination, particularly focusing attention on the Prime Minister. This is something we have witnessed on a number of occasions when the NDP and the Conservative Party have come together.

We treat all issues with the utmost importance, and I am hoping that I will be able to provide a little clarity on this. What we see on the other side is that any issue becomes a major issue, especially if members opposite can smear the government to attempt to make it look bad and take attention away from what the government is actually doing.

If we were to take a look at what the government is doing and accomplishing, we would find that no matter what the region of the country, there is a sense of hope, a sense that there is a stronger, more willing national government that is making a difference with respect to increasing the strength of our economy and better serving Canada's middle class, those aspiring to be a part of it and those who are working hard in our communities. I take a great sense of pride in what we have been able to accomplish.

Over the last while, we have not heard opposition members talking about policy issues related to Canada's economy or its social programming. This is because we are doing a fairly decent job and are having a very real impact on the lives of Canadians in every region of our country.

Let us move to the motion that has been brought forward today by the Conservative Party. Once again, I would suggest that Conservatives want, as much as possible, to make personal attacks against personalities within the government.

The Conservatives say that we do not have a responsibility to communicate with ministers, and in this particular case with the Attorney General. I take exception to that.

I have listened to the debate on this issue for a number of days. I have heard many questions and answers. I am very much concerned. Obviously, there is a bit of a different standard coming from the Conservative Party. In fairness to the New Democrats, they have never been in government, so we are not able to pass judgment over what they would have been doing in government.

Canada's feminist international assistance policy recognizes the critical role of grassroots women. Canada's national action plan includes the role of women. Only 5% of international funds right now are dedicated to peace and security or allocated to equality between men and women.

The petitioners therefore call on the Government of Canada to fund and implement its feminist international assistance policy, focusing support on grassroots organizations through diverse, predictable responsive funding mechanisms to allow the long-term role in civil society, in particular of women, and to increase the financial aid to other countries to 0.7% GNI.

FALUN GONG

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Falun Gong is a spiritual practice that consists of the principles of truth, compassion and forbearance, which is practised by millions of people around the world. Canadian citizen, Ms. Qian Sun, age 51, was illegally kidnapped in China on February 19, 2017, and has been illegally detained in Beijing's first detention centre for practising Falun Gong. Therefore, the petitioners request that the Canadian government condemn the illegal arrest of a Canadian citizen for practising Falun Gong and call for her immediate and unconditional release.

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, although I hope this issue will be addressed in the budget to be presented on March 19, I will rise in the House for as long as necessary to remind members that the people of Trois-Rivières have been waiting for 25 years. I will also remind members that the millions of dollars in studies sitting on the minister's desk all indicate that the government should stop studying and take action.

This is what the people of Trois-Rivières who signed this petition want, for a number of reasons. For example, it would help combat climate change, help stimulate economic development in the regions, and allow for travel between the regions.

We want action as soon as possible.

[English]

HUMAN ORGAN TRAFFICKING

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition in support of Bill S-240 on organ harvesting and trafficking. This bill will be considered at the foreign affairs committee tomorrow morning.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

• (1515)

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Business of Supply

However, I can tell members that considerable lobbying took place when Stephen Harper was the Prime Minister. There is no way that Conservative members can convince me that the Prime Minister's Office at the time did not have discussions and meetings with numerous cabinet ministers. I would suggest that we all have a responsibility to communicate what we believe are important issues to our constituents, and indeed to all Canadians.

That is one thing that I think we are missing out on. An interesting question was asked today by the Bloc, which expressed concerns with respect to the employees of SNC. We have not heard that argument. In fact, to a certain degree, the member for Timmins—James Bay, who sits in the front benches of the NDP Party, in essence said on the issue of SNC employees, “Who Cares?” To him, if SNC goes broke and no longer exists, others will pick up the slack for it. That is the type of mentality that at least some members within the New Democratic Party have on this very important issue.

• (1520)

There is a broader issue at hand here. Yes, there are things that occurred with SNC, and we as a government are very much concerned about the corruption allegations that have taken place in Libya. We understand and believe that there needs to be a sense of accountability. However, we also need to be aware of the 9,000-plus people who are employed by them here in Canada. There is a worldwide recognition for the company which has 40,000-plus jobs.

This is not something new. One would think, if one listened to the unholy alliance between the NDP and the Conservatives, that it is only the Liberals who are being lobbied by SNC. That is not true. Both the Conservative leader himself and the New Democratic leader, Jagmeet Singh, have had representations made by and been lobbied by SNC. Many members of the opposition benches have met and been lobbied by SNC equally, as have government or Liberal members of the caucus. That is nothing new. We are lobbied all the time. That is why we have independent mechanisms put in place to ensure there is a sense of transparency and accountability when it comes to lobbying.

The Prime Minister has done absolutely nothing wrong. I do not care how many times the Conservatives tell the members of the media and their constituents something different and try to spread what I believe is misinformation. Just because the opposition members, the unholy alliance between the NDP and the Conservatives, have said that the Prime Minister has done something wrong does not mean that it is true. That is what I believe is the case here.

That brings me to a couple of quotes. Unlike the opposition members, we recognize the value of our standing committees and the fine work they do, as well as the Ethics Commissioner and his independence.

The other day Mr. Wernick appeared before the standing committee and made a presentation. Before I comment on that, allow me to share this with those Canadians who might be participating and following this debate in any way.

Mr. Wernick was a top civil servant working under Stephen Harper. I believe he possibly worked at the Department of Indian Affairs as a deputy minister. I do not know all of the details. What I

do know is that he is an incredible, well-recognized, apolitical, independent civil servant who has been working at the high end, not only under this government but also under the Conservative government. It is really important for us to recognize that.

When Mr. Wernick came to committee, this is what he said specifically about the allegations we are hearing from the Conservatives and the NDP unholy alliance. He stated, “It is my conclusion and my assertion, based on all the information I have, that there was no inappropriate pressure on the Minister of Justice in this matter.” This is not someone who is partisan saying this, but Canada's top civil servant, someone who has made incredible contributions over different administrations to ensuring that we have the world-class civil service we have today. He stated, “based on all the information I have, that there was no inappropriate pressure on the Minister of Justice in this matter.”

I thought that another interesting quote from the same committee meeting was when Mr. Wernick said it was “entirely her call to make”, referring to the former Minister of Justice. She was the decider. I believe the Prime Minister has been consistent with respect to that from day one.

• (1525)

From day one, I believe that the Prime Minister has been very transparent and accountable on this issue. The Conservatives and the NDP, in an unholy alliance, believe that they can score some political points based on an article that appeared in *The Globe and Mail*. That article was referenced at the committee. They continue to push.

What is interesting is that the NDP, on the one hand, said that they believe that the Ethics Commissioner should be involved. They were the ones who encouraged the Ethics Commissioner to be involved, yet if we listen to what they are saying today, they say that the Ethics Commissioner is not going to be able to do the job. Now they say that they want more to be done. They want a public inquiry on the issue. Where was that confidence when they initially said that we should have the Ethics Commissioner engaged?

The Conservatives and the NDP are talking about standing committees. I can tell colleagues that as a government, this Prime Minister in particular has made a solemn commitment to our standing committees.

I was there when the Conservatives and Stephen Harper took ownership of all the standing committees. I was at PROC when the parliamentary secretary would be there dictating what would take place that day at committee. I was there when Stephen Harper would not allow any amendments, outside of government amendments, to pass.

We have seen a Prime Minister who has marginalized the role of parliamentary secretaries on standing committees. We have seen a Prime Minister who has committed additional funds to our standing committees. We have seen a Prime Minister and a Liberal caucus, on all those points, support independent standing committees. When I say that, I am referring to opposition amendments that have passed. Many opposition members have had the opportunity to pass amendments at standing committees.

Business of Supply

If we contrast Stephen Harper with our current Prime Minister, they are like night and day in terms of transparency and accountability when it comes to Canada's standing committees.

Now we have a standing committee that is actually looking into this issue. The former attorney general is going to be appearing. I could be wrong, but my understanding is that it was one of the Liberal members who put in the formal request for the former attorney general to come before the committee.

At the end of the day, the Conservatives and the New Democrats are coming together to say how badly we need to make the standing committees more independent, when the record of the Conservative Party was abysmal at best. We finally have a government that is committed to openness, transparency and accountability at our standing committees and inside this chamber.

The opposition believes that the standing committee is still not enough, even though, in many ways, such as financially and in terms of independence, we have supported it. It is where our chief civil servant was able to give a presentation.

When I listened to question period today and the interpretations of what took place at the standing committee, they were cherry-picking. I cannot blame them for cherry-picking, I guess, because I too am cherry-picking. I am cherry-picking what I believe Mr. Wernick made very clear to every committee member. Every member of this House is aware of exactly what it is Mr. Wernick indicated.

• (1530)

As I said earlier, Mr. Wernick said that the Prime Minister told the former attorney general that the decision to intervene in the case was hers alone, and the Prime Minister indicated that it was entirely her call to make, that she was the decider.

As Mr. Wernick indicated, "It is my conclusion and my assertion, based on all the information I have, that there was no inappropriate pressure on the Minister of Justice in this matter."

Since I have had the opportunity, as others have had the opportunity, to formulate opinions on the matter at hand, I feel very confident that there was not any inappropriate pressure. Hearing it from the top civil servant means a great deal to me. It reassures me. I hope it reassures Canadians.

It will not stop the opposition. I was in opposition for over 20 years. I can appreciate the potential of a good story. If a good story is there, and members think they have something to push to the *n*th degree, they should go nuts. However, maybe they should provide a little more than what they have actually provided to date.

Let us look at the questions the opposition members have been asking day in and day out. They are not providing anything new to the story, from what I can see, that ultimately justifies the type of discussions we are having here today. I do not say that lightly.

When I go back home every weekend, I like to get a sense of what is important to the constituents I represent. It is issues like jobs, health care and our environment people are genuinely concerned about. Those are the issues we should be talking about.

The Minister of Finance has announced that we have a federal budget coming up. I have some thoughts on what I would like to see

in the budget. These are the types of issues that are affecting everyday Canadians in all our regions.

It really makes me wonder about the commitment of the opposition. The bottom line is that it is hard to tell the difference between the Leader of the Opposition, who many would call Stephen Harper with a smile, and Stephen Harper.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, he could be behind the curtain, possibly.

I would argue that we should listen to how the Leader of the Opposition started his speech. He is referring to SNC-Lavalin and the issue of corruption and the rich, the powerful and the mighty, and so forth. He is trying to make it look as if SNC-Lavalin is meeting and conspiring with the government.

Members of cabinet, members of the Liberal caucus and members on this side did, in fact, meet with SNC-Lavalin, but so did the Leader of the Opposition. So did the Leader of the New Democratic Party and so did many others on the opposition benches. What disappoints me is that the opposition members do not seem to care about some of the potential victims, the thousands of employees who are working for SNC-Lavalin.

There is an opportunity, or there was an opportunity, and I do not know if that opportunity has passed. Canada, like the U.S. and the United Kingdom, has the opportunity to ensure that there is corporate responsibility and accountability while protecting our workers. I sure wish the opposition parties would do their job in looking after those jobs, too.

• (1535)

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to address all the factual inaccuracies in the member's prolonged statement. He talked about the alliance between the opposition parties. We are just trying to get at the truth, which is the job we have been sent here to do on behalf of our constituents.

I will remind the member, because he was elected in 2010, that there was an unholy alliance of the Liberals and the NDP with the separatists to try to depose a duly elected Canadian government. The office of the director of public prosecutions was made independent in 2006 by Stephen Harper. He created a lobbying commissioner and an Ethics Commissioner. The reason we know that so many things have been going wrong is because of all the things done on ethics and accountability by the previous Conservative government. I never heard the member thank Stephen Harper for doing all those things.

On September 4, the director of public prosecutions made a decision to deny SNC-Lavalin a deferred prosecution agreement. That decision was then confirmed on October 9. What we know so far is that at every single step, the former attorney general denied the Prime Minister's pressure. She said repeatedly to the Prime Minister's Office and to the Prime Minister directly and to the Clerk of the Privy Council that this company would not enjoy a DPA. I will mention, as a member of the Standing Committee on Finance, that the DPA was attached at the back end of an omnibus federal budget bill.

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How many times did the former attorney general have to say no to the pressure she felt in having to provide the company with a special deal, with a special agreement, so it could get off the hook? How many times did the Prime Minister's Office need to meet with the former attorney general on this particular issue?

We are not saying that cabinet members cannot talk to each other. We are saying that they cannot tell the AG what to do. In criminal prosecutions, the AG and the AG alone makes that determination. Why does he feel that the Prime Minister's Office was in the right?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister did not tell the AG what to do. That is the simple reality. What are members going to say next time? Are they going to ask whether the Prime Minister talked to this minister or tell another minister to do something specific? I understand the difference when it is the AG, but the bottom line is that there is a responsibility for the Prime Minister, and he has fulfilled his responsibility.

The members opposite seem to feel that jobs in SNC-Lavalin do not matter. A Conservative member tried to say that SNC-Lavalin jobs are not all that important or are more important to this government than jobs in Calgary. I have news for the Conservatives. It does not matter where the jobs are, this government does care about jobs. We also want to ensure that there is a high level of accountability for corporations that behave inappropriately. That can be done with the legislation currently in place, legislation the U.S. and the United Kingdom have.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my friend across the way believes that if he takes something that is not true and yells really loud about it, it sometimes will somehow become truthful. We have seen him time and again in this place wander around an issue without directly speaking to it.

He speaks about jobs. Some Liberals have claimed that white-collar crimes are victimless crimes, but they are not. Those very same SNC-Lavalin employees' jobs are at risk right now, because Liberals have soft-on-white-collar crime policies and SNC-Lavalin executives who committed bribery and corruption crimes are skipping any kind of sentencing at all. It is all the employees themselves who are somehow now culpable because Liberals will not enact this.

I will read a quote that is interesting:

It's really frustrating to see the level of mistrust and disgust that Canadians are having towards Parliament, towards the prime minister right now. It's time the prime minister showed some leadership and actually came clean on everything he knew, and the only way we're going to be able to do that, unfortunately, is if everybody testifies under oath.

Who said that? It was the current Prime Minister about the former prime minister during the Nigel Wright-Mike Duffy affair. He said correctly that Canadians lose faith in our institutions when they watch the Prime Minister not answer fully and faithfully the questions that are put to him.

We have asked the Prime Minister time and time again to waive solicitor-client privilege. We have asked the Prime Minister to come forward. We have asked Liberals at committee who resist every step of the way.

If Liberals really cared about jobs, why has the Prime Minister not visited Oshawa yet? If Liberals really cared about jobs, what about

the Sears pensioners? What about the Aveos workers? They claim that this is what it is about, when really what it is about is entitlement and access to the Liberal government. The wealthy and well-connected have total access.

If we need to change the law for SNC-Lavalin to get it a plea deal, what about changing the law for pay equity? What about changing the law for pensioners? What about changing the law for all those Canadians who do not have the access that a wealthy and well-connected company like SNC-Lavalin has?

• (1540)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the remediation agreement regime that was passed in the House is actually in place in other countries. This is not foreign to the western world. In fact, if New Democrats truly cared about jobs and the potential impact on thousands of people, who happen to be in Montreal in this particular situation, they would be changing their line of attack. They would not have the member for Timmins—James Bay asking who cares if SNC-Lavalin's actions are found to be criminal, because the jobs will just go somewhere else. That is the mentality of the New Democratic Party.

We can still ensure there is justice and accountability when a corporation does something inappropriate. This government does not support the criminal activities of corporations. That is why there is the potential for remediation agreements. That is why the U.S.A. has them and that is why the United Kingdom has them and that is why Canada has them now. However, it does not mean that we forget about some of the potential victims, those being the workers and many others.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when my colleague started his speech, he talked a bit about the fact that the opposition is always trying to drum up scandals, time and time again. Nothing demonstrates that more than the fact that every single time an opposition motion comes before the House, it is another attempt to attack or smear the government or a particular member of Parliament on this side of the House. It just demonstrates that the opposition has nothing really to attack, other than attacking individuals, smearing people and creating scandals where they simply do not exist.

I am wondering if the member, who spends a lot of time in this House, can talk a bit about how he sees the motions, generally speaking, put forward by the other side of the House.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, there are many other issues we should be debating, I would ultimately argue. We just had this debate a few days ago, yet it is back because the unholy alliance of the Conservatives and the New Democrats does not want to talk about what is happening in our economy. Those members do not want to talk about the progressive social policies that this administration is putting through.

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When we talk about jobs, over 800,000 jobs have been created by working with Canadians in all regions of our country. When we talk about supporting families, the Canada child benefit provided millions of dollars, with \$9 million going into my own riding every month in Winnipeg North, and what about helping out the poorest of all seniors with the GIS increases? As well, let us talk about Canada's infrastructure.

There is so much that this government has been able to do in three and a half years. It might take another mandate for us to be able to complete all the goals and aspirations we have.

We recognize that yes, this is a political year, and the opposition knows full well that we have done a relatively good job. As opposed to talking about those real issues, it wants to focus on negative politics.

Someone told me yesterday that the Conservatives are the Republicans of the north. It is all about character assassination. They are more interested in trying to make politics look like a bad thing, but politics is a wonderful thing. We can really make a difference. This government demonstrates that day in, day out.

• (1545)

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Carleton.

I am pleased to rise in the House on the opposition day motion. We are calling on the Prime Minister to appear before the justice committee and testify under oath to his alleged direct involvement in the coordinated and sustained efforts to influence the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin.

Last week Michael Wernick, Clerk of the Privy Council, appeared before the justice committee to testify to his involvement in and knowledge of the shocking allegations of political interference coming out of the PMO. Mr. Wernick's testimony came as a spot of light in the clouded secrecy and sidestepping that we have seen from the government to date, confirming what many Canadians had suspected: that the PMO undertook a sustained and coordinated campaign to interfere with the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin.

According to Mr. Wernick's testimony, the Prime Minister and his department continued to pressure the former attorney general even after she told the Prime Minister that she would not overrule the decision to allow SNC's case to proceed to trial.

He stated:

The question that I think you're going to have to come to a view with, as will the Ethics Commissioner, is inappropriate pressure.

He went on:

There's pressure to get it right on every decision: to approve, to not approve, to act, to not act. I am quite sure the minister felt pressure to get it right. Part of my conversation with her on December 19 was conveying context that there were a lot of people worried about what would happen—the consequences not for her, the consequences for the workers and the communities and the suppliers.

These inappropriate actions are clear attempts to force the hand of the former attorney general and pressure her into interfering with SNC-Lavalin's criminal trial. That said, the criminality of the actions of the Prime Minister and his office must be recognized.

Section 139 of the Criminal Code states that "Every one who wilfully attempts in any manner to obstruct, pervert or defeat the course of justice in a judicial proceeding...is guilty of" a crime. It is clear that this is exactly what has happened here—that the Prime Minister's Office has made a wilful attempt at obstructing justice.

Coming on the heels of the Liberals' voting down of a motion calling for a public inquiry and an investigation undertaken by the justice committee into the PMO's interference with SNC-Lavalin, and even going so far as to vote down a motion calling on all witnesses who testified before the justice committee to be sworn in under oath, these new revelations make it imperative that the Prime Minister appear before the justice committee and testify under oath about his actions. If the Prime Minister has nothing to hide, then he should be more than willing to appear before the justice committee. Anything less than that is a sure admission of guilt.

The chronology of events surrounding SNC-Lavalin's criminal prosecution is important, and so I would like to take a closer look at the timeline.

On February 19, 2015, the RCMP laid charges of fraud and corruption against SNC-Lavalin in relation to the company's dealings in post-Gadhafi Libya. When the Prime Minister took office, SNC-Lavalin began an aggressive lobbying campaign to implement measures to lessen the impact of its past actions. This lobbying campaign included numerous meetings with both political and bureaucratic staff at the highest levels. Let us keep in mind that SNC-Lavalin has been a historical supporter of the Liberal Party of Canada. Its Liberal insider executives led a campaign of illegal donations to the Liberals, ranging over \$100,000.

On June 21, 2018, legislation to implement a deferred prosecution agreement was snuck into the tail end of a massive budget bill and received royal assent.

On September 4, the director of public prosecutions informed SNC-Lavalin that she had no desire to pursue the negotiation of a deferred prosecution agreement. On September 17, the Prime Minister and the Clerk of the Privy Council, Michael Wernick, met with the former attorney general to discuss the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin.

• (1550)

On December 5, Gerald Butts, then the principal secretary to the Prime Minister, met with the former attorney general at the Château Laurier to discuss the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin.

On December 18, former principal secretary to the Prime Minister Gerald Butts and chief of staff to the Prime Minister Katie Telford spoke with Jessica Prince, then chief of staff to the now former attorney general. In the chain of command at the PMO, Jessica Prince answers to Katie Telford, who then answers to the Prime Minister. This conversation was highlighted by Mr. Wernick as one that may have been interpreted as political pressure.

On December 19, following a lunch with the Prime Minister and Gerald Butts, Mr. Wernick placed a call to the former attorney general in which he, in his own words:

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I conveyed to her that a lot of her colleagues and the Prime Minister were quite anxious about what they were hearing and reading in the business press....

On January 14, 2019, the member for Vancouver Granville was fired as Attorney General.

As members can see, for the last year the Prime Minister has been playing the long game. He has been plotting and scheming and organizing a concerted effort to help his friends at SNC-Lavalin avoid a criminal trial.

The government has come out with several reasons as to why the former attorney general was fired, but the story seems to change from day to day to day. Was she fired because she could not speak French? Was it Scott Brison's fault because he resigned? Was it Stephen Harper's fault? Was the former attorney general fired because she chose to speak truth to power and reject the Prime Minister's attempts to force her hand? Canadians deserve the truth.

To date, the Prime Minister has been stifling the former attorney general and skirting simple questions around his interference with the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin, citing both cabinet privilege and solicitor-client privilege with the former attorney general.

That manoeuvre will not cut it anymore, as Mr. Wernick's testimony has shown that the former attorney general did not act as a solicitor to the Prime Minister, saying:

The matter was never discussed at cabinet, never. So she was not giving advice to cabinet. She was not advising the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister must let the former attorney general speak truth freely to Canadians.

In the justice committee, I asked the current Attorney General if the legal opinion he was supposed to be preparing on solicitor-client privilege would be prepared in advance of the former attorney general's appearance before the justice committee. I was not surprised when I was met with an unclear non-answer, in which the Attorney General said that his answer to my question was covered by solicitor-client privilege.

There we have it. We have all the makings of a cover-up. A large corporation with the clock ticking launches a full court press lobbying campaign, getting the Prime Minister, his top advisers and top government officials on board. Then a former attorney general who respected the rule of law would not cave to pressure from the PMO. Then a convenient cabinet shuffle saw the former attorney general fired and replaced with a Montreal MP from right next door to SNC-Lavalin, someone who was willing to support the government's disregard for the rule of law.

Even if SNC-Lavalin is convicted, the Prime Minister has set out to make another escape route for his friends by considering making changes to ethical procurement rules that stipulate how long a company can be banned from bidding on federal contracts. The Liberals might make many shuffles to get an Attorney General who is willing to play ball with this Prime Minister.

I am calling on all members of this House to rise, do away with the juvenile laughter, look Canadians in the eye and tell them the truth. They need to call for the Prime Minister to appear before the justice committee to testify under oath about his alleged direct

involvement in the coordinated and sustained efforts to influence the criminal prosecution of SNC-Lavalin.

• (1555)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes for his contribution to today's debate, and also again welcome him to the justice committee. I will, however, point out a couple of clarifications and ask him a question.

The clarification is in respect of the rhetoric that was used by the member opposite about obstruction of justice triggering penal liability. For Canadians who are watching this debate, there is a very good reason why politicians are not the ones who direct law enforcement officials to make decisions about whom to arrest and whom to charge. That is simply because those decisions are based on evidence. They are not based on partisan considerations.

Let us review the evidence that we have before us. We have evidence from the Prime Minister that there was never any direction to the former attorney general. We have that evidence being confirmed at the actual committee that the member opposite attended, where the Clerk of the Privy Council said, "At every opportunity verbally and in writing in December, the Prime Minister made it clear that this was the decision for the Minister of Justice to take."

This is at least the third, if not the fourth time I have heard members of his party refer to exactly what transpired in January as a firing or as a demotion. When an individual, including a cabinet minister, has the opportunity to serve brave men and women who have nobly and courageously fought for this country, overseas and on this continent, how can that possibly be construed as a firing or as a demotion?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, speaking as a veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces, in terms of the duty that the Government of Canada owes to its veterans, it is much more worthy of our veterans to be given a minister responsible for the file, and that the file is not shuffled off to someone who would not do the Prime Minister's bidding. It is not then just slammed into another ministry because the government is so fraught with panic and the curtains are burning and they cannot deal with the mess that they have created. It is incumbent on the government to do better by veterans. For my brothers and sisters who serve in the Canadian Forces and served abroad and at home, I would ask the government and I call on the government to appoint a veteran to deal with this file, because at this rate, it looks like it is giving it no prominence and no significance whatsoever.

I would also call on the government to respect the independence of the committee and not dictate to its members who can and who cannot appear. Earlier, one of the speakers from the government side recognized the strong work of a Liberal member from the committee for having the former attorney general come. The opposition members made the same motion and it was defeated, before they received new instructions from the PMO on who was allowed to appear at committee.

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Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously people recall things. We had Michael Wernick, the Clerk of the Privy Council, the other day. We have had many people call for the former attorney general to come and be able to speak her truth.

Given the large role that the Prime Minister's Office has played in this affair, it is absolutely right that we should ask the Prime Minister to come to committee so he can also share this. If members opposite are convinced that nothing untoward happened, there should be absolutely no problem in extending that invitation to the Prime Minister so that members can have enough.

Does this member absolutely believe that it is fundamental to have the Prime Minister on record in part of the justice committee so that we can get to the bottom of this?

• (1600)

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, it is imperative, and I would expect it is for all members of the House. I am disappointed to hear that they think that it is an unholy alliance of members who would want the Prime Minister to testify under oath. If he has nothing to hide, he has no reason why he cannot appear before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and account for his actions. It would be in his best interests to cauterize the bleeding at this point.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today to discuss an extremely important issue about the independence of our judicial system, about whether or not we have one system of justice for the people and another for the powerful, about whether or not we have in this country a new golden rule where those with the gold make the rules. To ascertain whether we have devolved to that level, we need answers to serious questions.

Let me begin by laying out the timeline of events that led us to this debate today.

On September 4, 2018, SNC-Lavalin learned that the director of public prosecutions would not offer that company a so-called deferred prosecution agreement to avoid trial and prosecution for allegations of over \$100 million of bribery and fraud. At that moment, the decision was made. Almost two weeks later, on September 17, 2018, the former attorney general was called to a meeting with the Prime Minister and the Clerk of the Privy Council.

At that meeting, the Prime Minister and the Clerk of the Privy Council indicated their desire that such an agreement be offered to the company, in other words, that there be a deal allowing SNC-Lavalin to avoid trial and prosecution for these alleged crimes. On that day, the clerk and the Prime Minister learned that the former attorney general had decided not to offer such a deal to that company. The course of justice was set in place and that is important because subsection 139(2) of the Criminal Code makes it a criminal act to obstruct or defeat the course of justice.

We have significant evidence that members of the government attempted to do just that. For one, after the Prime Minister learned that his former attorney general would not offer such a deal and with full knowledge that the director of public prosecutions was not willing to offer such a deal either, he sent the Clerk of Privy Council, the Prime Minister's deputy minister, the most senior member of

Canada's public service, to call the former attorney general and express his desire to see such an agreement occur.

Then on December 5, the most senior staffer in the government reached out over a time period at a bar in downtown Ottawa in direct discussions with the former attorney general and indicated his desire for there to be a deal. Gerald Butts is not just any political staffer. According to the Prime Minister, he and his words are the Prime Minister's own words. The Prime Minister told the entire Liberal caucus that anything that comes from Gerald Butts comes from him. In other words, the former attorney general would have known, sitting in that bar at a famous Ottawa hotel, that whatever Gerald Butts said, the Prime Minister was saying.

Of course, the Prime Minister is called "prime" for a reason. He is the top minister. He chooses the entire cabinet. In other words, the reporting relationship is from the Attorney General up to the Prime Minister. In other words, when he repeatedly, in person, through his top public servant and later his top political staffer, indicates his will on a matter, then, by definition, the person receiving that information is under pressure to do it.

• (1605)

That term "pressure" is very clear, because the Attorney General is to operate as the top Canadian law officer for the Crown. While she or he is allowed to consult with members of cabinet, those members are not allowed to impose pressure under doctrines of law that are established over many decades and have been inculcated into jurisprudence. I speak of course of the Shawcross doctrine. Simply put, any Attorney General that is pressured into an action on a judicial matter, particularly a prosecution, will have experienced inappropriate interference by the government.

If a boss says to an employee he wants something done and the employee says no, and then the boss sends his top assistant and the employee says no again, and then he sends his top official and the employee says no a third time, and a month later he punts the employee from his job, would that employee really believe he has not experienced any pressure? Just think about it. The boss says an employee's job depends on doing this but there is no pressure and that the employee can make up his own mind.

The Clerk of the Privy Council had some interesting language about the term "pressure" when he testified. He admitted that the former attorney general "felt pressure". Those were his words. She felt "pressure to get it right". Those were also his words. What did "get it right" mean?

According to the Prime Minister, in a meeting with the former attorney general in September, and according to a phone call from the Clerk of the Privy Council not long after, and according to Gerald Butts on December 5, getting it right meant signing a deal. In other words, she was pressured to sign a deal. That pressure had the effect of attempting to defeat, pervert or obstruct the course of justice that had already been established on September 4, when the top prosecutor refused a deal, and September 17, when the former attorney general confirmed to the Prime Minister that she was not going to provide a deal either.

Here we are. Subsection 139(2) of the Criminal Code is very clear that it is an offence to alter the course of justice.

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We have significant evidence that the Prime Minister's Office under his personal direction attempted to do just that. If not, then the Prime Minister would have no compunction whatsoever about personally appearing under oath before the justice committee. When he was the leader of the third party in opposition, he specifically called on then prime minister Stephen Harper to testify under oath in another matter. The principle that prime ministers can never be asked to testify was apparently not known to the present Prime Minister, at least until now.

If the Prime Minister has nothing to hide, then he will come forward and answer questions under oath so that everyday Canadians can find out precisely what went on here and so that we can restore a sense of confidence that everyone follows the same rules. No matter how rich one is, no matter how much money or how many lobbyists one can summon for political assistance, no one is above the law.

●(1610)

Mr. Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's has made it sound that what is going on is very nefarious. He uses a lot of dramatic pauses, including in his online videos, to make it seem like something nefarious is ongoing.

He talked about the Shawcross doctrine, which other members have talked about, but they have left out another part.

I would like to quote Sir Hartley Shawcross, ask the hon. member what thoughts would be on this. He said:

I think the true doctrine is that it is the duty of an Attorney-General, in deciding whether or not to authorize the prosecution, to acquaint himself with all the relevant facts, including, for instance, the effect which the prosecution, successful or unsuccessful as the case may be, would have upon public morale and order, and with any other considerations affecting public policy.

My question is this. Why is the hon. member leaving that out that part of it when he is trying to slander other members of Parliament, suggesting that there is criminal activity afoot?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, first, I would point out that the legislation the government drafted in the budget, ironically, to amend the Criminal Code, created 715.3 of that code, which allows for deferred prosecution agreements, specifically excludes economic factors from the consideration of prosecutors in offering those deals to a criminally accused corporation.

The Liberals claim they were trying to protect jobs, but the bill that they introduced and passed, prevents them from using deferred prosecution agreements for that purpose. Therefore, we know they could not have been doing this to protect jobs. Their own legislation makes that impossible.

We further know that the government is currently reviewing the policy banning companies with criminal convictions from bidding on federal contracts. In other words, the government is of the view that it could allow SNC-Lavalin. after a possible conviction. to continue to bid on those contracts, without interfering in the prosecution at all.

All of these factors demonstrate that the Liberals interference in this case had nothing to do with jobs and had everything to do with protecting the alleged criminals at SNC-Lavalin.

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this may in fact be a point of order. With an apology to my friend, this could also be translated into a question, I suppose.

However, recently a letter was made public by the member for Vancouver Granville, the former attorney general, to the justice committee. The reason I rise on a point of order is that I think it is highly pertinent to the issues we have been discussing here, particularly around the issue of solicitor-client privilege.

Much of what has been said by the Prime Minister earlier today, both here and in public, and by the Clerk of the Privy Council, has inferred that somehow solicitor-client privilege may not apply with regard to the former attorney general's testimony at committee, which of course is something we are all eager to hear.

Let me just read a small section. This is the point of order that I wish to raise to clarify what has been misrepresented by particularly government members. I know my keen friend from the Liberal ranks will want to hear what his former attorney general says. She says:

The government can waive solicitor-client privilege and Cabinet confidence. I cannot. As to the *sub judice* convention, I believe that it would be useful for the Committee to have before it an authoritative statement of the scope....I would prefer not to schedule my appearance before the committee until we have whatever clarity we can have about these issues. Once we have that clarity, I would be pleased to present before the Committee until we have whatever clarity we can have about these issues. Once we have that clarity, I will be pleased to appear before the Committee at the first available opportunity.

The reason I raise this for my friend is that it has been inferred many times by the clerk and by the Prime Minister himself that just simply saying that she can testify and speak to whatever she believes is pertinent, does not meet the test of waiving solicitor-client privilege.

This is germane to the debate and it is central to the Liberals' argument today that the former attorney general is able to speak freely, that she is no longer bound by solicitor-client privilege. We have a letter from her and she is referencing her counsel, former Supreme Court Justice Cromwell. This is clearly relevant to the debate today and clearly pertinent to the Liberals' central argument that there is nothing preventing the former attorney general from testifying.

It seems to me that in her own words and in correspondence we now have from her, this is something the Liberals should stop saying. We should allow the Prime Minister to simply decide if he is going to waive this privilege and allow the former attorney general to speak freely.

●(1615)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): The hon. member for Carleton in 40 seconds or less, please.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, that could not have been taken from my time because it was a point of order.

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The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): I will be honest that when it started off, I was not sure if it was a question. Then it went to a point of order and then it came back. Therefore, we did stop the time. That is why I added about 25 seconds to the time. Therefore, if the hon. member does not mind, he has about 35 seconds or less. I was trying to make sense of it myself, just to figure out whether it was a point of order. I think we have found a happy medium. If that is okay with the member, I will let him continue.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, we are all trying to make sense of the Prime Minister's constraints on the ability of the former attorney general to speak. Today, after three weeks of relentless pressure, he is starting to back down and accept that the attorney general should have the opportunity to speak. However, he is saying that she can only speak on matters that he considers relevant and that he will decide what she can say given there are court proceedings under way.

The Prime Minister does not decide what is at stake in a court. None of the conversations between his office and her office are going to be on trial at SNC's criminal prosecution, although they may be at a future criminal prosecution for different charges of other people. He does not have the ability to constrain somebody who is a member of Parliament to speak about those things, and his attempt to do so may violate the privileges of the hon. member for Vancouver Granville. However, we on this side will continue to defend her right to speak.

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, based on this last intervention, we can all agree there is a complex legal regime that surrounds confidentiality and is something that needs to be discussed and analyzed quite thoroughly in a non-partisan arena. As we have seen over the last few days, it has become quite partisan, to the point of creating what has been called an unholy alliance between the Conservatives and the NDP.

I know a lot of the NDP members from Montreal are out pulling votes. I gladly provided them with a map of Outremont for their benefit. The joke is on them because they do not do door-to-door all that much.

In any event, I will get on with the core of my speech.

I would like to address the House on a very important aspect of this debate, one our government takes very seriously, which is our integrity regime that governs how we do business with suppliers. Let me be clear about where our government stands on this issue. Simply put, unethical business practices should have no place in the Government of Canada's business at all. We do not, and will not, stand for it. Canadians should not, and will not, stand for it.

The fact is that corporate wrongdoing imposes significant, economic and social costs that can weaken competition and threaten the integrity of our markets. It can also place barriers on our economic growth and significantly increase the cost and risk of doing business. Additionally, it undermines public and investor confidence.

I want to assure Canadians that protecting the integrity of our public programs and services is one of our highest priorities. How we do business with suppliers is by no means an exception. The fact is that the Government of Canada spends approximately \$20 billion

per year on procurement contracts, real property agreements, the management of Crown-owned properties and rental payments on over 1,690 lease contracts across the country.

These are significant dealings that call for a robust and effective integrity regime, which is precisely what we have. It helps foster ethical business practices, ensures due process for suppliers and upholds the public trust in those dealings. As the government's central purchasing agent and real property manager, Public Services and Procurement Canada is deeply committed to ensuring the highest ethical standards in everything it does. Fraud, collusion and corruption have absolutely no place in our dealings. That is precisely why PSPC has a rigorous framework around prevention, detection and enforcement. The framework is firmly based on the values of fairness, transparency and accountability, and it is focused on delivering real results for all Canadians.

In 2015, Public Services and Procurement Canada put in place a government-wide integrity regime aimed squarely at ensuring the government did business with ethical suppliers in Canada and abroad. As part of this work, PSPC conducts more than 20,000 integrity verifications annually on contracts and real property transactions. The names of ineligible and suspended suppliers are posted on the department's website.

While our integrity regime is strong, our government is committed to making it even more effective in the fight against corporate wrongdoing. In fact, since taking office, this government has taken significant steps forward to do just that. Our commitment to Canadians has always been to ensure our approach remains transparent, rigorous and consistent with best practices in Canada and abroad.

In everything we do, we believe consultations are an important step in ensuring clear and transparent laws and policies fair to all. Our approach to improving and modernizing how we deal with corporate misconduct is no different. In 2017, we conducted a public consultation to seek input on expanding Canada's tool kit to address corporate wrongdoing. Government officials consulted over 370 participants and received 75 written submissions.

In keeping with our commitment to transparency, we released a report that summarized the views of those who participated in this consultation process. The report is available to all Canadians online, and I encourage all members to read it.

Business of Supply

•(1620)

Based on what we have heard, last year we began the work to update and enhance our approach. Those actions included a number of provisions that we are discussing today for remediation agreements, equivalent to the Canadian deferred prosecution agreements, which are essentially an additional tool to hold corporations to account. Let me underscore the words “deferred prosecution agreement”. It is not something that was conjured up yesterday. I would point the House to a number of provisions in the Criminal Code of Canada that date back to early 2000 that deal with how we treat corporations.

Dealing with corporations that have committed serious offences is important for the integrity of our markets, the integrity of Canadians, but sentencing has to deal with justice, fairness and proportionality. I know the Conservatives have criticized us for suggesting that we need to protect jobs in this country, but the provisions that allow us to do that, or that allow prosecutors to do that for that matter, are in black and white in the Criminal Code.

Let me read for the House, section 718.21 of the Criminal Code, which tells about which factors the court considers when imposing a sentence. We are not talking about a deferred prosecution agreement, and I will be quite clear about that. This is when a company has been found liable and the court needs to consider factors in sentencing. It reads as follows:

A court that imposes a sentence on an organization shall also take into consideration the following factors:

- (a) any advantage realized by the organization as a result of the offence;
- (b) the degree of planning involved in carrying out the offence and the duration and complexity of the offence;
- (c) whether the organization has attempted to conceal its assets, or convert them, in order to show that it is not able to pay a fine or make restitution;
- (d) the impact that the sentence would have on the economic viability of the organization and the continued employment of its employees;
- (e) the cost to public authorities of investigation and prosecution of the offence;
- (f) any regulatory penalty imposed on the organization or one of its representatives in respect to the conduct that formed the basis of the offence;
- (g) whether the organization was - or any of its representatives who were involved in the commission of the offence were - convicted of a similar offence or sanctioned by a regulatory body for similar conduct;
- (h) any penalty imposed by the organization on a representative for their role in the commission of the offence;
- (i) any restitution that the organization is ordered to make or any amount that the organization has paid to a victim of the offence; and
- (j) any measures that the organization has taken to reduce the likelihood of it committing a subsequent event.

We have heard in the House over the last week, in various political panels, that these were novel regimes designed to whitewash actions of a corporation. They are quite the contrary. People who are saying that have no particular understanding of what the Criminal Code considers as fairness, justice and proportionality in sentencing.

I do not discount partisan read, but I question the people who are suggesting this particular knowledge of the Criminal Code. The provisions I cited date back to about 15 years.

The remediation agreements are similar in the objectives that they seek, and I need to highlight them here as well. For purposes of my next quote, I am citing section 715.31 of the Criminal Code, which

talks about remediation agreements and underscores their purpose. It reads as follows:

The purpose of this Part is to establish a remediation agreement regime that is applicable to organizations alleged to have committed an offence and that has the following objectives:

- (a) to denounce an organization’s wrongdoing and the harm that the wrongdoing has caused to victims or to the community;
- (b) to hold the organization accountable for its wrongdoing through effective, proportionate and dissuasive penalties;
- (c) to contribute to respect for the law by imposing an obligation on the organization to put in place corrective measures and promote a compliance culture;
- (d) to encourage voluntary disclosure of the wrongdoing;
- (e) to provide reparations for harm done to victims or to the community; and
- (f) to reduce the negative consequences of the wrongdoing for persons—employees, customers, pensioners and others—who did not engage in the wrongdoing, while holding responsible those individuals who did engage in that wrongdoing.

•(1625)

There has been a lot of discussion about how this has been taken in Quebec, the reaction in Quebec and the alleged willingness of Quebecers to glance over this. I mentioned in a prior speech that the rule of law is as equally important in Quebec as it is in any other province. However, we hear this narrative coming back into the Conservative discourse particularly. They are thinking that Quebec will somehow let these issues off the hook faster than they would in other provinces. I find it disgusting. We have told them to say it in French and they do not. If one aspires to lead this country, one needs to hold a discourse that has the same narrative across this country, in both official languages. I am not hearing that from members of the opposition.

I also heard a member of the opposition suggest that a member of Parliament, conveniently from Montreal, was appointed to be Minister of Justice and Attorney General, which somehow insinuates that he would be more lenient on a company that has its headquarters in my riding. Before I get into the substance of it, let me remind this House of the merits of the current Attorney General. He has a Ph.D. from Yale. He served as a professor at McGill University for many years and has given impeccable legal advice throughout a distinguished career. To have a member of Parliament stand up and question his integrity is a disgrace. We can talk about bashing Montreal MPs. I am one. The member can bash me, that is okay, but I do not stand it for any of my colleagues. Regarding the allegation that he made against the current Attorney General, I would invite him to say it outside of the House.

What we have talked about today, and what we will continue to talk about presumably over the next few days, is a regime that is intended to put a company that has admitted its crime, paid its dues and taken steps to ensure the measures it is accused of cannot and will not happen again is given a deferred prosecution agreement. That means that if it violates that agreement, it can be prosecuted. It does not mean it is off the hook. However, it does allow it, for example, to compete internationally against similarly situated companies that may or may not have benefited, and more often than not may have benefited, from similar regimes in projects that require that type of regulatory framework.

Business of Supply

As I mentioned before, SNC-Lavalin can defend itself. It has capable lawyers. However, let no one in this House suggest that the deferred prosecution regime was intended for any particular company. It is a regime that balances three things, proportionality, justice and fairness, to allow companies not to have terminate innocent employees, for example, among other things. Any member of Parliament who is suggesting that this is a Quebec thing not only does not understand Quebec but also does not understand the company they are levelling accusations against. It has most of its employment outside Canada, and most of its Canadian employment outside of Quebec.

The enhanced policies that I have set forth expand on policies that are already in existence but that we have sought to make better. In certain circumstances, companies can be declared ineligible or suspended from doing business with the government. These policies also provide flexibility in determining periods of ineligibility to ensure that they are proportional, and based on the nature and the context of the offence and the steps taken by the suppliers to address misconduct. I would also note that under our current policy, a supplier found guilty of committing an offence may be declared ineligible for a period of up to 10 years.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

The ineligibility and suspension policy is an important component of the integrity regime. It sets out when and how a supplier may be declared ineligible or suspended from doing business with the government for a period of up to 10 years.

Allow me to inform this House about some of the things we learned and how we have taken action to address feedback gathered during those consultations, specifically as it pertains to our integrity regime.

First and foremost, it was encouraging to see that participants were fully supportive of fair, proportional and transparent measures that enable the government to take action against corporate wrongdoing. They also supported measures that ultimately hold companies accountable for misconduct.

Among the majority of stakeholders, there was a call for additional discretion and flexibility within the integrity regime, specifically into the provisions of the ineligibility and suspension policy. As we look to strengthening the regime, we know that we must strike a balance by considering more flexibility in the policy that directs it and expanding the list of circumstances that could result in ineligibility.

Let me come back to the matter currently under debate. I am a bit perplexed at the request to have the Prime Minister appear before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. Over the past two weeks, I have seen the Prime Minister answer 40 questions on the matter for a total of 45 minutes and that does not include the questions that we all heard today. We have had questions from six MPs and two party leaders—the leader of the Conservative Party and the leader of his own party, the name of which escapes me, the hon. member seated at the back near the leader of the Green Party. Obviously the NDP House leader also asked questions of us.

I analyzed the questions, and I do not want to repeat all of them, but obviously the Conservatives' questions were disrespectful and implicated the Prime Minister's principal secretary, Gerald Butts, an individual who served our country with honour and integrity. I want to emphasize that. Canadians are indebted to him. The Conservatives wanted to call into question that individual's dignity and the way he served our country, no matter what the cost.

I know there is one member of the NDP who will laugh at this, but I wanted to compliment the parliamentary leader, who called for the waiving of solicitor-client privilege. The Prime Minister answered that question very respectfully. I will tell him because he is not in the House. I do not want to point out someone's absence from the House. The NDP's questions were more respectful than those of the Conservatives, with few exceptions. There was one question about lifting the confidentiality regime. Obviously, we would need to debate that to determine why confidentiality should be waived. There are cases before the courts. We have to look at striking a balance, achieving a proportionality, before confidentiality can be waived, whether we are talking about cabinet confidences or solicitor-client privilege.

In my private practice, I was subject to solicitor-client privilege. Any time we wanted to waive that privilege, all of the potential impacts had to be examined.

There are two cases before the courts. There is talk of an investigation by the Ethics Commissioner. Obviously, these considerations could harm the interests of Canadians and third parties. This is something that must be figured out between the former attorney general and cabinet as such.

I am sure—and this will make the debate less partisan—that this will be settled among lawyers in a sober and deliberate way, and that the former minister of justice and attorney general will have the chance to speak candidly.

• (1635)

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his speech. I do not have any questions for him, but I do have a comment. I have been listening to this debate all day, and I have not heard a single opposition member say that this company should receive special treatment because it is based in Quebec. I have not heard a single member of the House mention that this company is based in Quebec, that it has employees all over the world or that it could be considered a flagship of Quebec industry.

I did, however, hear members talk about the interference by the Prime Minister's Office in a criminal matter and about the fact that the former attorney general of Canada was put under so much pressure that she is now an ordinary member of Parliament and not a member of cabinet. She resigned after the Prime Minister said that her presence in cabinet was proof that there was no interference. This is what we are debating today.

Business of Supply

On September 4, the director of the Public Prosecution Service of Canada decided there would be no special agreement for the company, and she confirmed that decision on October 9. Over the following three months, the Prime Minister's Office and his staff put sustained pressure on the attorney general, who resigned and is no longer in cabinet. An hour ago, she sent a letter to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights saying that she cannot appear as a witness until solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence are waived. She will therefore not talk to the committee about the pressure she was subjected to and the information she has. That is the matter we are discussing today.

With this motion, we are asking the Prime Minister to do what he does every Wednesday in the House. We are asking him to take an hour or two of his time to appear before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to testify and tell the truth and nothing but the truth about this specific case.

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question. With respect to his first observation, I would suggest that he listen to what his friend said when he subtly impugned the integrity of my colleague, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, by saying how convenient it was that the minister is from Montreal. That is an obvious case of Quebec-bashing. I would encourage him to speak to his colleague and ask him to apologize because that is unacceptable.

With respect to what he said next, waiving confidentiality involves some very complex considerations. If he wants to ask the Prime Minister questions, he can do so in the House. If he is not happy with the questions his leader asks, he himself can ask the Prime Minister. There is ample opportunity to do so every Wednesday.

• (1640)

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his remarks, but I do not agree with him, particularly when it comes to waiving confidentiality.

We just received a letter from the former attorney general and minister of justice. She rose in the House to explain why she would not be voting on an NDP motion calling for a public inquiry. She said that she must and hoped to speak her truth as soon as possible.

In the letter we just received, she stated that she cannot appear before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights because the Prime Minister did not want to waive confidentiality, which would allow the former minister to testify and speak her truth. That is extremely serious.

The Prime Minister said that we should take the word of the Clerk of the Privy Council. The clerk stated that there was nothing to prevent the former justice minister and attorney general from speaking about this file.

Therefore, does my colleague not believe that the Clerk of the Privy Council is right and that waiving confidentiality is not a complex matter?

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his question.

Canadians expect there to be robust discussions between the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and the Prime Minister's Office in a G7 country, a pluralistic democracy.

Canadians expect there to be extensive, even difficult, discussions on certain issues, especially issues that could hurt our country, whether we are talking about jobs or any other issue. Otherwise, we would be living in a democracy that does not reflect who we are. Obviously, in this particular case, the final decision was for the former attorney general to make.

The nature of those discussions is quite unique. They are subject to cabinet confidentiality, in other words, cabinet confidence, within a solicitor-client relationship. There are two kinds of confidentiality, perhaps even three or four. The confidentiality we are talking about refers to the legal privilege that exists between solicitors and their clients. There is also a general confidentiality regime.

People are confused, and they have every reason to be. However, the regime must have a partial exception for matters in which the clients, who in this case are cabinet and the Prime Minister, speak about matters that could be secret and could have unintended consequences for third parties. We do not want information to get out that could undermine an ongoing court case, for example, or, and I am obviously speculating here, that would have a negative impact on a third party or inadvertently reveal secrets. As a citizen, I think that secrets should stay within cabinet.

I am a member of the caucus, and I expect my cabinet to keep secrets. I expect some matters not to be known in the public sphere. This is absolutely reasonable to me. Lawyers obviously need to have a non-partisan discussion to understand the scope of what the witness would testify to. I support these kinds of discussions, in order to give Canadians the truth they are looking for.

[English]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a lot of confusion about the factors that can and cannot be considered in developing deferred prosecution agreements.

First, the member for Carleton said that one cannot consider economic factors. Indeed, the prosecutor must not consider the national economic interest. However, under "Purpose", as per the law, remediation agreements are:

to reduce the negative consequences of the wrongdoing for persons—employees, customers, pensioners and others—who did not engage in the wrongdoing, while holding responsible those individuals who did engage in that wrongdoing.

Therefore, one can consider the financial costs for employees, whether they be pensioners or current employees.

Second, the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley said that the current government has not done anything to fight white-collar crime. Actually, deferred prosecution agreements are a way of fighting white-collar crime, because they, and I am quoting Lawrence Ritchie, from Osler, "encourage the voluntary disclosure of misconduct by corporations for criminal activities that may otherwise have remained unknown to regulators".

Therefore, I think there still needs to be a lot of clarification so that the opposition really understands what we are talking about here.

Business of Supply

•(1645)

Mr. Marc Miller: Mr. Speaker, I am a politician, so I will comment, but normally I would not, as that was extremely well said.

The national economic interest was put into that agreement because of our obligations under the anti-bribery treaties with the OECD countries. It is intended to ensure that we do not let a company go simply because the national interest demands that we do so. It is to avoid protectionism and to avoid rewarding wrongdoers. It is not a provision that is intended to exclude every single large company in this country.

I would note, in the case of the company everyone is speculating about, that it is a company that has jobs outside Canada. Therefore, we could perhaps make an argument that these sorts of considerations would not apply to it. However, these are important things, because we do not want to encourage bad behaviour and protectionist behaviour. That is why these provisions were put in place. However, they cannot be interpreted so broadly as to exclude large companies in this country.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mr. Anthony Rota): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Essex, Canadian Heritage; the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, Infrastructure; the hon. member for London—Fanshawe, Foreign Affairs.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill.

I am very pleased to talk to members of Parliament today about our party's opposition motion, which reads as follows:

That, given the Prime Minister's comments of Wednesday, February 20, 2019, that the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights is the appropriate place for Canadians to get answers on the SNC-Lavalin affair, and given his alleged direct involvement in a sustained effort to influence SNC-Lavalin's criminal prosecution, the House order the Prime Minister to appear, testify and answer questions at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, under oath, for a televised two-hour meeting, before Friday, March 15, 2019.

This is a very important matter. Essentially, the motion states that the Prime Minister is hiding his involvement in this case. His involvement is serious because it constitutes interference in our justice system. Some might even say that, in Canada, attempting to influence a judicial process is a crime.

This has been going on for just over two weeks, and in the past few days, it has become clear that the Prime Minister is a key player in this matter. We are talking about the Prime Minister of Canada. He is surrounded by important people who advise him and do his work on the ground behind the scenes, in an attempt to protect him. These people play a key role in the scandal that broke just over two weeks ago.

If the members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights do not have an opportunity to question the Prime Minister directly, we will never know the full truth. He is hiding to avoid giving the real version of the facts.

For the benefit of those watching at home, I will now give a brief overview of everything that has been said in the House of Commons or in the media over the past two weeks.

This all began with a budget implementation exercise in which the Liberal government tried to sneak through legislation to allow for remediation agreements.

What is a remediation agreement? It is a way to prevent a corporation from being convicted of fraud or corruption. These types of agreements are also designed to protect the jobs of the people working for the corporation, so they are not penalized for management decisions that may involve corruption in some cases.

Rather than following the path of transparency and including this in a justice bill, the Prime Minister surreptitiously slipped it into a budget from the finance department so that no one could ask any questions.

In doing so, no parliamentarians from any party, including senators, could ask the justice minister any questions in an effort to improve the bill, which would have been the right thing to do, to see what the Liberals' real intentions were, or where they wanted to go.

Time passed, and on September 4, 2018, the director of public prosecutions announced that the government could not negotiate a remediation deal with SNC-Lavalin.

The director of public prosecutions is neutral, and she works closely with her legal experts and advisers. Under no circumstances should any parliamentarian attempt to influence her decisions. Apparently, the Prime Minister decided that the director of public prosecutions had not made the right decision. The former attorney general, who was also the justice minister at the time, endorsed and supported that decision.

Then, rather curiously, on September 17, 2018, the Prime Minister met with the former attorney general to discuss the matter.

•(1650)

In the days that followed, there was a blitz of meetings with very influential people and SNC-Lavalin lobbyists. They tried to influence the former attorney general's decision in the matter. On December 5, Gerald Butts, senior adviser and friend to the Prime Minister, pressured the former attorney general. As I pointed out, so did the Prime Minister, on September 17.

On December 19, Mr. Wernick, this government's top public servant, told the former attorney general, who should be independent and has experts to provide her with legal advice, that, in his opinion, she had not made the right decision. I said "in his opinion", but I could say in the Prime Minister's opinion. I would like to point out that the director of public prosecutions confirmed this decision once again on October 9. The decision was confirmed on two occasions.

Business of Supply

It appears that if you do not agree with the Prime Minister, you are wrong. That is when the monkey business started and pressure was brought to bear to try to change the former attorney general's mind. It was not enough to be told no. It was not enough to apply pressure. She refused to budge, and we all know where that landed her. After the holidays and before the House resumed, there was a cabinet shuffle. Suddenly, this justice minister, whom no one had complained about, lost her job just because she did not want to do the Prime Minister's bidding. She believed in her heart and soul that she had made the right decision. The Prime Minister and his advisers should never have pressured her.

That is what gave rise to what is now being called the SNC-Lavalin scandal. That is what the media is calling it. It is not an SNC-Lavalin scandal, it is the Prime Minister's scandal. That is the reality. We should be focusing on that and allowing the former attorney general to speak. She is asking to speak, but just an hour ago she refused to appear before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights because she would not have the complete freedom to give her side of the story. We will not know what happened. We will once again be left with a Prime Minister who hid the truth and was not transparent with people.

Then, there was a dramatic turn of events. After the Prime Minister blamed former minister Scott Brison for stepping down and said that what happened may have been his fault, and after saying that neither he nor his close collaborators ever interfered in the matter, we saw his principal adviser and close friend step down. He did not step down because he made a mistake. He said he stepped down because he did nothing wrong. That is incredible. No one here called for his resignation even though he was the Prime Minister's best friend and principal adviser. The fact is that he stepped down simply to protect the Prime Minister from the fallout of the major mistake he made in this file.

The strange thing is that the Prime Minister has given several different versions of what happened. First, he said that the allegations were false. Then he blamed the former attorney general for the confusion. He is shifting the blame because he is unable to take responsibility for his own actions. He said that the Ethics Commissioner's investigation would be enough to get answers in this case.

I would like to remind everyone that he is the only prime minister in the history of Canada to have been found guilty by the Ethics Commissioner four times. That has done nothing to change his behaviour.

He reminded the House that the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights is independent and impartial, but then he refused, via the Liberal committee members, to accept the proposals that the Conservative Party made to the committee.

What is more, the member for Mount Royal said that it was the former attorney general's fault because she did not speak French. Those same members make a huge deal about trying to defend French. Everything that we have heard is rather unbelievable. The story has been changing every day for the past two weeks, and we still do not know the truth about this scandal.

I would like to remind members that this scandal is not about SNC-Lavalin, but about the Liberal Prime Minister. It is an obvious failure. The election is approaching. Canadians have the right to know the truth about this matter.

• (1655)

Lastly, according to Jean-Claude Hébert, it is obvious that the Liberal government committed a serious parliamentary blunder by inserting such changes into the Criminal Code via a federal budget implementation bill.

We need to shed some light on this matter, and we expect the government and this Prime Minister to tell Canadians the whole truth.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by the member opposite, but I would like to point out one thing and ask him a question.

First of all, this is the second time in a row that it has been said that the course of justice had already been established on September 4. The member for Carleton also made that statement in his comments.

[*English*]

This is effectively stating that the course of justice had been set as of September 4.

Mr. Wernick was asked this very question about discussions that were appropriate, as he described them, with the former minister of justice after September 4. He said that they were indeed lawful and appropriate in the course of having discussions between the Prime Minister's Office and in and amongst cabinet members.

The illogic of the position that has been outlined by two Conservative members is really quite stark. There are things that are known as attorney general directives, and those attorney general directives sometimes apply to litigation that is already in the courts. One was put out with respect to indigenous litigation and one with respect to HIV litigation. I just put that out there to outline the illogic of the position being articulated on the opposition benches.

The question I have relates to where the member finished his speech with respect to the ethics investigator. We know that the ethics investigator has the power to summon witnesses and the power to require them to provide evidence under oath. The ethics investigator also has the power to require those witnesses to produce documents. For the purpose of enforcing those powers, the ethics investigator has the same power as a court of record.

Is it the position of the member opposite that the ethics investigator is not an independent forum that cannot find the answers that he seeks?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, if the government and the Prime Minister have nothing to hide, as the member opposite says, then why is the Prime Minister choosing not to waive the solicitor-client privilege binding the former attorney general and justice minister?

Why will the Prime Minister not vote in favour of our motion to have him explain his actions to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights?

Business of Supply

All we want is the truth, and that is what Canadians want too. If they have nothing to hide, the Prime Minister and the former attorney general should appear before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to answer questions transparently in public. All we are asking for is transparency.

Canadians are smart. They will be able to see through the rhetoric. Believe me when I say that, on October 21, we will clean up the mess on that side of the House.

• (1700)

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague's remarks and everything members have said since this debate began. As I am neither a lawyer nor an expert in the Criminal Code, deferred prosecution agreements or remediation agreements, it was an interesting legal education for me.

One Liberal member even shared some statistics at the end of his presentation. He told us that, since this whole issue—which has more to do with how the Prime Minister handled things than with SNC-Lavalin itself—first came up, the Prime Minister has fielded 45 questions on the subject. Unfortunately, he did not share statistics about the number of answers we received. It seems to me that we have received about two or three different answers to those 45 questions, and they probably all meant the same thing.

How confident is my colleague that the Prime Minister would provide legitimate answers to questions the members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights would ask him if this motion were to receive the approval of the House?

Mr. Alain Rayes: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for that very important question.

When I take a look at the situation, my trust in this Prime Minister is not very high. However, I would think that in committee, in front of the cameras, faced with a barrage of questions from all the opposition parties, he would have no choice but to tell the truth, because if he lied, Canadians would see it on his face.

One of the reasons I do not really trust him has to do with the senior official who appeared before committee last week and said that cabinet never discussed this file. That contradicts what the Minister of National Revenue said on the radio last week, when she told the host that she could not talk about discussions that were held within cabinet. Even the Prime Minister said that he could not talk about it because these cabinet discussions were confidential. We see that there are two versions and that the Prime Minister is not telling the truth, which is very unfortunate for Canadians.

[*English*]

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to have the opportunity to speak to such an important motion today. I would like to start by reading the motion the opposition is putting forward:

That, given the Prime Minister's comments of Wednesday, February 20, 2019, that the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights is the appropriate place for Canadians to get answers on the SNC-Lavalin affair, and given his alleged direct involvement in a sustained effort to influence SNC-Lavalin's criminal prosecution, the House order the Prime Minister to appear, testify and answer questions at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, under oath, for a televised two-hour meeting, before Friday, March 15, 2019.

I held a town hall in my riding of Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill on Sunday on taxes, tariffs and trade. We had a good discussion on taxes, tariffs and trade, but what most of my constituents wanted to know was what the SNC-Lavalin affair was, and perhaps more importantly, why it mattered.

It is highly complicated and confusing, with a lot of different information surrounding it. Therefore, what exactly is it and why does it matter? First and foremost, it is not about SNC-Lavalin and it is not about jobs. It is specifically about the coordinated, unsolicited and sustained pressure on the former attorney general to politically interfere and overturn a decision by the director of public prosecutions to proceed with the prosecution of fraud and bribery charges against SNC-Lavalin.

That is quite complicated, but what it is more importantly about is the pattern of behaviour from the government, the Prime Minister, his staff, ministers and cabinet in general, undermining the democratic institutions at the very core of our rules-based order and who we are as Canadians.

Let us talk about that for a bit. The executive branch, the judicial branch and the legislative branch are critically important pillars of our democracy. They are structured in such a way as to be independent and somewhat separate from each other because they act as checks and balances on each other. Within the executive branch, there is cabinet and the Prime Minister. They have specific responsibilities as well, not the least of which is to not politically interfere in the judicial system and to protect and preserve the independence of that judicial system.

Why is that important? It is that ultimately our democracy and rules-based order is dependent on every citizen, company and organization being equal in the eyes of the law and justice being blind to their race, ethnicity, creed, vocation, language or whatever it is. Secondly, those decisions must be made with only the law in mind, not with political interference.

In this case, we are looking at a Prime Minister who had a pattern of inappropriate and possibly illegal behaviour. First of all, he said that the former attorney general has the authority to make these decisions on her own because they are her decisions and hers alone. There is an issue with that. As a mother, when I tell my son I want him to do the dishes, is it his decision whether he does them or not? It is actually not really his decision because I have a certain amount of authority over my son, or I like to think I do. If my daughter, who is younger than my son, were to ask him to help her with something, it truly would be his decision.

• (1705)

Therefore, when the Prime Minister asks the former attorney general to do something, it absolutely is pressure, because, as we can see, she decided not to take the course of action that he was recommending. As a result, he put even more pressure on her after that decision was made, and in the end she actually was removed from her position. One has to ask if someone else was put in her place to do what she would not.

Business of Supply

The other key thing here is that the Attorney General and the Minister of Justice may physically be the same individual, but they are two separate and distinct responsibilities. Cabinet, the Clerk of the Privy Council and even the PMO under our rules, regulations and laws have the ability to advise and support the Minister of Justice, but they do not have that same privilege for the Attorney General, because the Attorney General is acting as a capacity of that judicial system, which is separate. Therefore, to confuse those two positions further undermines it.

One has to ask what the responsibility was of the PMO, Gerald Butts and others when they were having meetings with the former attorney general and applying pressure at the Château Laurier. One does also have to ask why the meetings were at the Château Laurier. It is not a normal operation of our business. We have offices here in the House of Commons and other government buildings around the town, so we should be having meetings there.

Of course, there is the Clerk of the Privy Council who has a responsibility to advise and support the execution of the machinery of the executive branch but not to advise the Attorney General on legal matters.

The three important aspects of democracy are truly what is at stake in this conversation. The rule of law and our democracy are incredibly important, and that is why we are here to talk about it today. To say that this motion for getting to the truth is for partisan political points absolutely grossly misrepresents the severity of this conversation. Each and every one of us, as members of Parliament or as ministers in the executive branch, has sworn an oath to this country and to the Queen to uphold democracy. If we cannot rely on members of Parliament to be above partisan policy when the very nature of our democracy is at stake, then what is the value of being in the House? If we will not stand up to protect, preserve and defend our democracy, and in so doing ensure that individuals holding important positions in the executive branch are held accountable in accordance with our laws, then who will?

That is why this motion is so incredibly important. We must get to the truth. We must ensure that the very nature of our democracy is preserved, and we must find a way to have the courage on both sides of the House to remember that we are serving Canadians first. We get paid by Canadians, not by a political party, and we are here to deliver for Canadians not only a government agenda but also the very nature and fabric of our democracy.

That is what is at stake in the SNC-Lavalin case. It is not about jobs and it is not about SNC-Lavalin. It is about whether or not the individuals in this institution are upholding their responsibilities, and this motion is critically important to be able to get to that.

I hope that all in this House will support this motion to protect, defend and preserve our democracy.

• (1710)

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member began her intervention by saying that the rule of law was somehow not being properly defended or was being threatened by this situation, but Mr. Wernick, in his very powerful testimony, opened by saying:

Should Canadians be worried about the rule of law in this country? No. In the matter of SNC-Lavalin, it is now seven years since the first police raid on the

company and four years since charges were laid by the RCMP, and during that entire time and up to today, the independence of the investigative and prosecutorial function has never been compromised.

Mr. Wernick is an exceptional public servant—so exceptional, in fact, that he served under Prime Minister Harper. That means Prime Minister Harper had confidence in Michael Wernick. He had confidence in his judgment and he had confidence his integrity, but then all of a sudden Mr. Wernick says a truth that is not the truth of the opposition, and we hear calls of partisanship. Why are we changing our view based on what the opposition wants to hear, not on what is the truth?

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question, because ultimately we have to ask ourselves if the Clerk of the Privy Council is the keeper of the rules-based order in Canada, and therefore is he, in his capacity as Clerk, the authority to speak on that matter? I would argue that it is not the Clerk of the Privy Council's role or responsibility. He is there to support the government agenda, the Prime Minister, ministers and cabinet as the senior bureaucrat, the senior deliverer of the machinery of the executive branch. He is in no way the legal authority to determine whether there has been political interference in the rule of law and whether it has been carried out in its capacity.

• (1715)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in her speech the member talked a lot about the various institutions and people we have to hold accountable. She talked very eloquently about it, and I would not disagree with what she said in terms of how those institutions are to be represented and the authority they have.

However, the thing is that there are two institutions currently using two different processes to look into these particular questions. Those are the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, which is currently holding hearings, as we know, while at the same time the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner is conducting an investigation.

Why is it, given the member's position on how important these institutions are, that the opposition does not seem to trust that these institutions can provide Canadians with the answers they are looking for?

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Mr. Speaker, I am excited to answer that for the simple reason that it is a representation of the confusion around this issue. The Ethics Commissioner has responsibility for ethics, not for political interference, not whether the former attorney general was influenced in any way. We also have a food and drug administration, but we are not getting it involved in this issue either, because it is not its responsibility and authority to investigate something of this nature.

When the member speaks about the justice and human rights committee, that is a fundamentally different thing. Yes, that committee is reviewing this matter, but we are not going to hear from one of the key people if this opposition day motion is not passed. The Prime Minister is a key witness; how can an investigative committee do its real work if it does not get to hear from the people it needs to hear from to get the entire truth?

Business of Supply

Absolutely, if Liberals are saying the justice committee is the place for this issue to be investigated, then we need to hear from all of the people implicated in this case.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have been listening to the debate today, there has been a lot of confusion between what is appropriate and what is not, and a lot of discussion as to where the various different cards fall with respect to obligation. I would like to take my time today to talk about the Shawcross and *sub judice* principles.

In Canada, there is a fundamental and constitutional principle that the Attorney General should act independently of any partisan consideration when exercising his or her discretion. The Supreme Court of Canada stated that this is a fundamental principle in the 2002 case of *Krieger v. Law Society of Alberta*.

It is important to understand what exactly the principle requires and what constitutes and does not constitute political interference with prosecutorial discretion. The Shawcross helps us to understand this concept, which is why I would like to take a few minutes to discuss it.

In short, the principle emphasizes the paramount importance of the independence of a prosecution while recognizing that it is entirely appropriate for the Attorney General to consult with his or her cabinet colleagues before exercising his or her powers of prosecution. The principle comes from Sir Hartley Shawcross, who in a speech to the United Kingdom Parliament in 1951 explained how the Attorney General should exercise his power to authorize criminal prosecutions, and what legitimate consultations the Attorney General could have with other members of the government in exercising this power.

Shawcross did not invent the principle, but his words on this subject are probably the most famous. I think it is worthwhile reading a part of his speech that is now recognized in the principle.

I think the true doctrine is that it is the duty of an Attorney-General, in deciding whether or not to authorize the prosecution, to acquaint himself with all the relevant facts, including, for instance, the effect which the prosecution, successful or unsuccessful as the case may be, would have upon public morale and order, and with any other considerations affecting public policy.

In order so to inform himself, he may, although I do not think he is obliged to, consult with any of his colleagues in the Government; and indeed, as Lord Simon once said, he would in some cases be a fool if he did not. On the other hand, the assistance of his colleagues is confined to informing him of particular considerations, which might affect his own decision, and does not consist, and must not consist in telling him what that decision ought to be. The responsibility for the eventual decision rests with the Attorney-General....

I would like to emphasize what I think are important elements of this speech. First, the Attorney General must consider whether the prosecution is in the public interest.

Second, in making the assessment, the Attorney General can consult with other members of cabinet, since they can offer insight into what might best serve the public. Sometimes consultation with cabinet colleagues will be important in order for the Attorney General to be cognizant of pan-government perspectives. These consultations can improve the quality of decision-making. Such consultations are not to be equated with interference or prosecutorial discretion. In short, the Shawcross principle does not preclude consultation and says that in some situations it is to be encouraged.

Third, the responsibility for the decision of whether or not to authorize the prosecution is that of the Attorney General alone. Cabinet can in no way direct the Attorney General to make a particular decision.

Fourth, in making the decision of whether or not to prosecute, the Attorney General may not act in a partisan way and must be guided only by the public interest.

In 1978, the Attorney General of Canada, Ron Basford, referred to the Shawcross principle while explaining to the House of Commons his decision not to initiate a prosecution under the Official Secrets Act. He explained the constitutional and legal principles that he had to take into account as the Attorney General. I think it would be useful to quote his words on that. He said:

The first principle, in my view, is that there must be excluded any consideration based upon narrow, partisan views, or based upon the political consequences to me or others.

- (1720)

In arriving at a decision on such a sensitive issue as this, the Attorney General is entitled to seek information and advice from others but in no way is he directed by his colleagues in the government or by Parliament itself.

This is by no means the only time the principle has been adopted by the Attorney General of Canada. Provincial attorneys general have also spoken on it, such as Ontario attorneys general Roy McMurtry and Ian Scott, in 1979 and 1987 respectively.

It is generally well recognized that the Shawcross principle applies to attorneys general in Canada unless a legislative limit has been placed on the ability of the attorney general to consult with respect to particular prosecutions. This is the case, for example, in Nova Scotia.

I want to turn now to a concrete example of how this principle was exercised in the U.K. in the Corner House Research case. The director of the Serious Fraud Office, who exercises both investigatory and prosecutorial authority, was conducting an investigation into bribery allegations in the context of military aircraft contracts between a British company and the Saudi Arabian government. The company sought to stop the investigation on the basis of its potential impact on a huge export contract and its effect on relations between the United Kingdom and the Saudi government. When the fraud office was about to examine the Swiss bank accounts, a representative of the Saudi government made a specific threat that if the investigation continued, there would be no contract and it would imperil intelligence and diplomatic ties.

Ministers of the U.K. government, including the prime minister, advised the attorney general and the director of the fraud office that if the investigation were not shut down, “the consequences would be grave, both for the arms trade and for the safety of British citizens and service personnel”.

The British ambassador to Saudi Arabia warned that “British lives on British streets were at risk”. The director of the fraud office decided, after extensive consultation, to terminate the investigation. The case was heard by the House of Lords, and it concluded that there was no clash with the rule of law. The director could legally make the decision he had to make. Even more, the House of Lords said that with all the facts the director had, any responsible decision-maker could not have done otherwise.

Business of Supply

This example shows how important it is for other ministers, and sometimes for the Prime Minister, to inform the Attorney General of particular elements that may affect his or her decision to prosecute. The public interest effects that may arise from a prosecution are relevant considerations in this regard and they could have an impact on the Attorney General's decision to initiate prosecution.

In the example of Corner House Research, the public interest considerations shared with the attorney general and the director of the anti-fraud office were that the security of British citizens was threatened and that it would have had a negative impact on diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia.

Thus, while the Attorney General can, and in fact should, consult with members of his or her cabinet, what is of paramount importance is that the responsibility for a potential decision rests with the Attorney General, who ultimately exercises that responsibility independently and is guided solely by the public interest.

I would now like to turn to the *sub judice* convention. In our parliamentary system, we adhere to and respect well-established constitutional principles and conventions. Foremost among them is the principle of the separation of powers, which our Supreme Court has emphasized is a principle that is fundamental to the workings of Parliament and the courts. This principle requires that each branch of government recognize the role of the other branches and respect the appropriate limits of its own role. As such, by convention, members of Parliament do not comment on matters that are pending before the courts. This is known as the *sub judice* rule, *sub judice* being Latin for “under judicial consideration”. Until that judicial consideration is complete, the convention dictates that the matter not be discussed in the House of Commons.

The rule is described in *Parliamentary Rules and Forms of the House of Commons of Canada*, as follows: “Members are expected to refrain from discussing matters that are before the courts or tribunals which are courts of record.”

• (1725)

On another point:

The purpose of this *sub judice* convention is to protect the parties in a case awaiting or undergoing trial and persons who stand to be affected by the outcome of a judicial inquiry.

In chapter 13 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, it says:

It is also understood that matters before the courts are also prohibited as subjects of motions, petitions or questions of the House. This restriction exists in order to protect an accused person or other party to a court of action or judicial inquiry from any prejudicial effect of public discussion of the issue. The convention recognizes the courts, as opposed to the House, as the proper forum in which to decide individual cases. As Speaker Fraser noted, the convention maintains a “separation of mutual respect between legislative and judicial branches of government”. Thus, the constitutional independence of the judiciary is recognized.

This guide goes on to point out that restrictions serve to protect an accused or other party from prosecution or judicial inquiry from a prejudicial effect arising from a public discussion of the matter.

The Supreme Court of Canada has recognized the important role the *sub judice* rule plays in preserving the separation between the role of the courts and that of Parliament. In its 2005 decision in

Canada (House of Commons) v. Vaid, the court affirmed the following:

It is a wise principle that the courts and Parliament strive to respect each other's role in the conduct of public affairs. Parliament...refrains from commenting on matters before the courts under the *sub judice* rule. The courts, for their part, are careful not to interfere with the workings of Parliament.

We here in this House insist on respect for parliamentary privilege. Parliamentary privilege is “one of the ways in which the fundamental constitutional separation of powers is respected.” On the other hand, we must also remember that the separation of powers requires respect for the related constitutional principle of judicial independence. As a result, we must refrain from interfering directly or indirectly in the role of the courts. That especially holds true for courts seized with criminal prosecutions and related matters. We must therefore respect the case law convention, because it contributes to the respect of the principles of the separation of powers and the independence of the judiciary.

We need to maintain a balance between the powers, roles and functions of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. This long-standing convention is one of the important means we have to maintain that balance. The convention recognizes the courts, as opposed to the House, as the proper forum in which to decide individual cases. Furthermore, it is also important to note that the convention has been applied consistently in all matters relating to criminal cases.

In our parliamentary system, speaking on matters that are before the courts of justice, particularly courts seized with criminal matters and related proceedings, may risk prejudicing the outcome of a trial and may affect the protection of due process, including the presumption of innocence afforded accused persons in our society. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms constitutionally guarantees the right of persons charged with offences “to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law in a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal”. I am certain that no member in this chamber would want to undermine that fundamental constitutional right by discussing matters that are within the rightful purview and jurisdiction of the courts and that are pending before them a decision.

This brings us back to the reason for the rule: to protect not only the constitutional principles of judicial independence and the separation of powers but also the constitutional rights of accused persons. In a House respectful of those principles as well as constitutionalism and the rule of law, we must do all we can to avoid interference, or even the perception of interference, with due process, the broader principles of fundamental justice and the impartial role of the courts. The *sub judice* rule helps to protect judicial independence and the rule of law by avoiding the risk that judges or juries could be seen to be influenced by the debate in this place.

• (1730)

Given that the matter implicating SNC-Lavalin is presently before the courts, it is important that we exercise the requisite prudence and refrain from discussing these matters—not only, as I have described, in order to protect parties, but also because the trial could be affected by the outcome of the debate in this House.

Business of Supply

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Madam Speaker, I served on justice committee in the last Parliament and learned quite a bit about how our system fits in, so I was quite interested in what the member had to say.

I am also fascinated that he chose the Shawcross principle and conveyed it also with the *sub judice* aspect, simply because he is arguing that there needs to be a strong differentiation to ensure that people have equality under the law.

That is absolutely true. However, the Prime Minister and his staff and, I would even gather, the Privy Council clerk decided, unsolicited, to try to change the mind of the former attorney general. The member is absolutely right that the Shawcross principle allows for the AG to consult, which means to ask for input, but it does not work the other way around, whereby they could suddenly say they want to talk to her and want to influence the situation.

Is the member concerned about keeping the protections of the equality of law and the rule of law by separating the legislative and the executive branches from the judicial branch? My concern is that the Prime Minister and his staff have interfered with that process and now are undermining the rule of law.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, the problem with the question and the statement that the member made is that he is assuming that pressure was applied. What I was discussing and what I put on the table and what I talked about in my speech is that it is completely legitimate for the discussions to take place, provided that the end result, the decision at the end of the day, is made by the Attorney General.

That member has absolutely no proof to suggest otherwise, other than the trumped-up conspiracy theories that the Conservatives love to put on the table these days because they understand, and to a certain degree they are not entirely wrong, that they can influence public opinion through trumping up fear and scandal where they just simply do not exist.

• (1735)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind members that there is plenty of opportunity to ask questions and make comments but to please wait until I ask for questions and comments to say anything unless the member has been recognized by the Chair.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am going to follow up on the comments made by my colleague from Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola. He asked a clear question, and you stood up and talked about the *sub judice* rule and the importance of the separation of Parliament and the judicial branch. However, you are also standing up here defending—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member to please ask her questions through the Chair and not to individual members.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, the member is defending the executive branch in its failure to exhibit that same respect for the process. That is the question here.

I would like to ask him to stand up and suggest that it is okay for the executive branch to interfere in the judicial process when he so clearly articulated how it was not okay for Parliament.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, the reason my speech and what I had to say were germane to the discussion is that the Conservatives would like to exploit something that the average person does not understand, and that is what the relationship should be between the Attorney General, cabinet and those who are helping to advise cabinet.

If those members stopped heckling for a second and listened to my answer, the member who asked the last question would realize that I have already answered it. The fact is that the relationship exists and that appropriate discussions can take place, but at the end of the day the decision comes down to the Attorney General. That is exactly what has happened in this case, despite the fact that the Conservatives would like people to believe otherwise.

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, just by way of clarification, specifically what Mr. Wernick said at the committee hearing is that we are discussing “lawful advocacy”, and that all of the conversations were “appropriate, lawful and legal”.

I want to ask my colleague about remediation agreements. Certain things are covered by confidentiality and privilege, but remediation agreements and the law are clear. The purpose of remediation agreements is to avoid negative consequences on people like employees, customers and pensioners. Remediation agreements talk about the fact that in order to participate in one, responsibility has to be admitted, any benefit received must be forfeited, a penalty must be paid, and there must be agreement to co-operate with further investigations.

In light of the fact that five members of the G7—Japan, France, Britain, the United States and now Canada—have remediation agreements, is this the type of provision that the member's constituents in Kingston and constituents around the country would like to see in terms of harmonizing our rules with the rules among other members of the international order, including our specific G7 trading allies?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, it is critical that we harmonize the rules and procedures we have with our major trading partners and all partners of the G7. This is how we are going to continue to develop the global economic relationships that will be beneficial for everyone.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Speaker, I would think that if the member actually took the time to talk to his constituents, he would realize they have concerns.

It is interesting that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice now wants to talk about deferred prosecution agreements. If that is the case, why did the justice committee not study them? It is because the proposal was buried in an omnibus bill. Finance committee members did not even know that it was slipped in until it came up.

Business of Supply

I will go back to a quote. “It is a pillar of our democracy that our system of justice be free from even the perception of political interference and uphold the highest levels of public confidence.” The Prime Minister said to Canadians that the best disinfectant is sunlight. We have asked the Prime Minister, as well as others, to present his view of the events so that we can get to the bottom of this because, again, to quote the former attorney general, we must “uphold the highest levels of public confidence.”

What does the member have to hide with respect to having the Prime Minister share exactly what went on?

• (1740)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, as has been mentioned many times in the House, the Prime Minister has indicated that he is seeking legal counsel from the Attorney General regarding his ability to waive the privilege that currently exists.

As I indicated in my speech, it is absolutely imperative that we ensure that people are properly protected so that what is discussed in the public does not impact a particular court case.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I want to remind the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola to allow the member to answer the question. If he has another question, he can always get up and ask it.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Speaker, I extend my apologies to the member opposite. He has really engaged me in his speech today, which I hope is gratifying for both of us.

In his previous answer, the member said that he believes that people need to be “protected” and that the Prime Minister is weighing whether he can lift solicitor-client privilege. This is important for us to know. Is the member opposite suggesting that the Prime Minister is not being clear with Canadians and that somehow he is using client-solicitor privilege as a means to prevent the truth from coming out?

As I said earlier, the former AG said in a statement after the shuffle that the confidence of Canadians, at the highest levels, is of utmost importance to her. Does the member believe that?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, this is exactly what the Conservatives do. They take what was said and try to spin it.

The member opposite knows full well that when I said “protected”, I was talking about those going before the courts who have the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty. He knew exactly what I was talking about, but instead he tried to spin it in a way that made it sound as though I was trying to say something that simply was not the case.

The Prime Minister has indicated that he is currently seeking advice from the Attorney General as to whether he can waive solicitor-client privilege.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would just like to

inform the House that Wednesday, February 27, 2019, shall be an allotted day.

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BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to note I will be sharing my time with the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

I am glad to have the opportunity to rise to debate this really important motion today, which is calling for the Prime Minister to go before the justice committee and provide some clarity as to what is actually going on.

What I think we need to do is to first cast back to pre-2006. There was something happening at that time that was very important. The Gomery inquiry was happening with respect to the sponsorship scandal, which was about broad corruption, illegal activities and the funnelling of precious taxpayer dollars to suit the Liberal Party's purposes. It was a really significant issue. Canadians were very concerned about what was going on and in actual fact it put the Liberals into the penalty box for the next 10 years, because Canadians saw what the Liberal government was doing with respect to its ethics and inability to protect taxpayer dollars.

Then the Conservatives took over in 2006 and recognized that there were some significant issues that needed to be addressed. We brought forward the Federal Accountability Act and also set up the office of the director of public prosecutions to try to keep that separation that was so important and to deal with some of the many flaws we had seen regarding large amounts of dollars going from taxpayers to the benefit solely of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Then 2015 came along and we had a Prime Minister who talked about sunny ways, about transparency and about doing things differently, and Canadians listened and gave him a majority mandate. I think what they were given was a veneer and a good talk. However, what we have found over the last three and half years is that was all it was. I have used this example before and I will use it again. If we take a health care example, what we have is a Prime Minister who might have a good bedside manner but is absolutely not the person we would want performing our diagnosis, surgery or behaving in any way we would expect from our leadership.

We are three years in and we have broken promises. We have a deficit that the Liberals promised we would not have. They promised electoral reform, yet look at what happened with that. Then we had a series of ethical violations. There was the Aga Khan issue, where I believe the Prime Minister was found guilty of four violations when he accepted a trip. Does this sound like the Liberals from 10 years prior? It sure sounds like those Liberals to me. We had the handing out by the prior fisheries minister of a lucrative surf clam contract to friends and insiders. Also, we had the Minister of Finance, who managed to forget the villa in France that he owned. Not many of us would forget a villa in France, but he happened to.

Business of Supply

What we have seen is not only a series of broken promises but also a number of ethical violations. To me that is a huge betrayal of the trust that Canadians put in the Liberal government in 2015 when it made so many promises to be different and to be better.

This brings us to where we are today, which is really quite a sordid saga that we have in front of us. Many of us were surprised when the former attorney general was unceremoniously shuffled into the veterans affairs portfolio. Certainly, anyone watching that ceremony that day could tell that she was not particularly pleased with what was happening.

This is a government that had promised never to introduce omnibus budget bills. However, for my portfolio, there was an addition to reserve policy that I asked the indigenous affairs committee to look at. The Liberals refused. They voted us down, did not allow us to look at that and it was shoved into a budget bill.

• (1745)

There was also the deferred prosecution agreement clause, which now in retrospect is one of the first dots that we need to connect. We will have a number of dots to connect in order to provide a very clear story.

We have a prosecution agreement. We know a company was working very hard to have that deferred prosecution agreement made into law. Things were going along quite well according to the plan. The plan all along was to allow the deferred prosecution agreement. The Liberals can say what they want with respect to other countries, but clearly it was put there for a purpose.

Then we heard in September that the independent public prosecution office was not going to play ball with the Prime Minister's plan.

The government talks about the importance of *sub judice*. We heard in a prior speech how critical it was to separate the judicial branch and the legislative branch. We also have an executive branch and there should be a similar separation, but the Liberals are not talking about that today. They so far have not shown they have any respect for the critical importance of the separation of the executive branch with the judicial branch.

We talked about the budget bill. We had the decision by the public prosecution. Now we have what is now a well-documented outreach. This is not the Attorney General of Canada asking for advice or support; this is outreach by the most powerful in the country. Gerald Butts of the Prime Minister's Office and the Clerk of the Privy Council just happened to do outreach to the former attorney general to suggest she needed more context around her decision.

It is absolutely shameful that they would ever suggest that was not pressure. They were the head of the Privy Council and Mr. Butts. The Prime Minister said that when Mr. Butts spoke, it came from the Prime Minister. Do not let anyone ever say that is not pressure when they happened to be giving context, asking if she would rethink her decision when she had already made it.

One of the articles I read this weekend was perfect. It said "How many times does our attorney general have to say no?" The company is still lobbying and it wants a different decision. The Clerk of the Privy Council suggested that this was appropriate pressure. That is

not appropriate pressure and I think no one out there believes it was appropriate pressure.

We need the ability not only to hear from the former attorney general, we need to hear from the Prime Minister, because we have potentially not only a breach of interference from the executive branch to the judicial branch. I am not sure that we do not have something criminal going on here and we need to get to the bottom of it.

• (1750)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in reference to this debate today, the member for Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola actually had his facts wrong when he talked about the lack of scrutiny and discussion about remediation agreements. It was studied at the justice committee on November 7. It was studied at the finance committee, at the Senate committee and that all occurred after year-long consultations.

Today, the member has said that we do not have any respect for the separation between the judicial and the executive branch. I find that kind of commentary quite rich coming from a member of that level of experience, given the track record of the previous government when the former prime minister, Stephen Harper, threw Beverley McLaughlin under the bus for daring to comment on the qualifications of a potential Supreme Court appointee.

In respect to the separation and the accountability mechanisms, there is one. It is called the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. It has undertaken a study and has indicated clearly on the record that the witness list is not closed. Why is the position of the opposite benches such that they are unwilling to let the justice committee continue to do its important work in shedding some light on this issue?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, when the justice committee was first considering this issue, there was a long list of witnesses presented by both the official opposition and the NDP for consideration. The Liberals are simply using their majority to cherry-pick which witnesses they want to attend committee.

The member asked why we would not let the justice committee do its work, and absolutely it is going to do its work. However, I think it is also important, when an issue is as important as what we have before us today, that we hear the will of Parliament, or at least to hear the opposition, and hopefully a few brave backbenchers, who will do the right thing and recognize it is important for the Prime Minister to come to committee to share his truth as he understands it.

Business of Supply

• (1755)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, this is a serious matter. Parliament is not often presented with a motion in which the sitting Prime Minister is being called to testify under oath in front of Parliament. It did happen in a previous Parliament when Stephen Harper was here. The Liberals joined with us, I suppose in some form of alliance they were happy to participate in then, to call the then Prime Minister Stephen Harper to testify under oath at committee.

The reason that was so serious was because the concerns and allegations under the Nigel Wright-Mike Duffy affair went right into the heart of the Prime Minister's Office. What had taken place had money exchange hands, which was rightly concerning to Canadians. My Conservative colleagues do not always want to remember those days, which is fair enough, but that was something that Canadians, including even Liberals in that case, wanted to know about what was going on in the Prime Minister's Office.

However, now the allegations that have been put forward into the public, on which the Prime Minister is constantly shifting stories, is that within his office the former attorney general may have received constant and unrelenting pressure to allow a plea deal to a company that had extensively lobbied the government for special treatment. That is special access. That is two sets of laws: one for specially connected people and companies, and another set for everyone else.

When we are dealing with this gravity of power and the potential abuse of that power, is it not time for Canadians to hear from the Prime Minister himself?

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, it is important to point out that a Conservative scandal was a \$16 orange juice and paying taxpayers' dollars back where it was felt it did not pass the smell test. I think what we are talking about is absolutely on a different scale.

At the start of my comments, I spoke about the sponsorship scandal and how the Liberals had this sense of entitlement about how they could use taxpayers' dollars for their own purposes, their own gain. We are now hearing how the Liberals continue to do that. Whether it is the Aga Khan or some of the other issues where they have been found guilty of ethical violations, they continue to blur the boundaries to accomplish what they want. In this case, some of the most powerful people in this country pressured the former attorney general, a first nations woman, an accomplished woman. We were all proud of her when she took over that role, and she has been unceremoniously turfed because she did not do what they wanted her to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to participate in this debate, even though, as a Canadian, I would have preferred if this sad story had never happened.

What we want to know is how much political interference, by the Prime Minister or the PMO, occurred in a criminal case.

One of the cornerstones of our democracy is the separation between politics and justice. There has to be a wall between the two. However, unfortunately, there has obviously been political interference in a criminal case.

Let us review the facts. In 2015, criminal charges of corruption were brought against a large corporation in Montreal regarding its dealings in Libya. Unfortunately, this same company was found guilty of corruption less than a year ago in the case involving the McGill University Health Centre, or MUHC, in Montreal.

Then, on June 21, the government passed omnibus Bill C-74. At the very end of the bill, there is a measure concerning remediation agreements that has absolutely nothing to do with the budget.

Over seven or eight pages, the government clearly defined a process to allow a company that is facing serious international prosecution, as is the case here, to sign an agreement with the government. If, by chance, this were ever to happen, the bill explains the procedure.

I want to remind members that subsection 715.32(3) explicitly states that "the prosecutor must not consider the national economic interest". The prosecutor is the Government of Canada.

This omnibus bill passed with clauses regarding agreements, as defined earlier, that have absolutely nothing to do with the budget. This happened on June 21.

In similar cases, the director of public prosecutions could look into the matter, make a decision and inform the respondent. This is exactly what happened. On September 4, the director of public prosecutions informed the company in question that she would be moving forward and that an agreement was not possible. There we go.

Nearly three weeks ago, The Globe and Mail reported that strong pressure on the former attorney general allegedly led her to quit her job, a very prestigious position in our parliamentary system if ever there was one.

What happened?

On September 17, the Prime Minister of Canada contacted the former attorney general to discuss this case. On December 5, the Prime Minister of Canada's principal secretary contacted the former attorney general to discuss this case. On December 19, Canada's top public servant, the most powerful man in the public service of Canada, the Clerk of the Privy Council, picked up the telephone and directly contacted the former attorney general. On January 14, the former attorney general was relieved of her duties by the Prime Minister. Those are the facts.

We now want to find out just how much undue pressure was applied to influence the former attorney general.

I should mention that last week, The Globe and Mail, the newspaper that broke the story that has been tarnishing the government's image and consequently Canada's image abroad for the past three weeks, published another story claiming that the former attorney general told cabinet that she had been subjected to undue pressure.

Was she subjected to undue pressure, yes or no?

Last week, Canada's top public servant clearly stated three times that, yes, there had been pressure, but that it was not undue pressure.

Business of Supply

Of course it was not undue pressure. It was just pressure from the Prime Minister, his principal secretary and Canada's top public servant.

One, two, three people pressured the former attorney general about a specific matter, and that was not undue pressure? Clearly, there was undue pressure on Canada's former attorney general.

● (1800)

Canada's highest-ranking public servant testified that, yes, there was pressure, but it was not undue pressure. With all due respect to that important figure in our political hierarchy, I have something to say to him. If the question is whether the pressure was undue, I would rather hear the person who was pressured, not the party applying the pressure, say whether it was undue or not, whether it was appropriate or not. In this particular case, the end result was the former attorney general's departure, since she was relieved of her duties.

As I said, *The Globe and Mail* exposed the whole affair three weeks ago. What happened then? The government and the Prime Minister have treated us to a comedy of errors ever since. The Prime Minister changed his story at least five times over the first few days. He contradicted himself at least five times. He started off by saying that no one could comment on the matter due to cabinet confidence. Canada's highest-ranking public servant contradicted the Prime Minister last week when he said it was never discussed in cabinet.

The Prime Minister clearly stated that the continued presence of the former attorney general in cabinet spoke for itself. Fifteen hours later, she quit cabinet for good. It does not get much clearer than that. That is what happened.

A few days later, a teary-eyed Prime Minister apologized for not being quick enough to condemn the bad people who had attacked the former attorney general. An hour later, here in the House, she said she was eager to speak her truth.

I was here in my seat. The Prime Minister was 10 or 12 feet away from me. I can say one thing. If looks could kill, it would not have been pretty. He was not happy when the member said she was looking forward to sharing her version of events.

From the start, we have wanted everyone to testify, from the former attorney general to the Prime Minister's chief adviser or the Prime Minister himself. Initially, when we asked for that, government members called it a witch hunt and a distraction. Eventually, they realized it was the right thing to do. The country's top civil servant and the former attorney general can testify. That is a win.

We need the whole truth to come out. That is why, in this motion moved by the leader of the official opposition for the good of Canada, we are calling on the Prime Minister, the one who ignited this scandal, to give his side of the story.

Today I heard the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons say at least 10 times that the Liberals have confidence in the work of parliamentary committees, that they respect the committees. Let them prove it. The best way to shed light on this is to allow the key players in this affair, unfortunate as it may be, to give their version of the facts. So far we have only heard the version

of Canada's top public servant, the Clerk of the Privy Council. God knows that that testimony was spectacular to say the least, given all the revelations there have been. He talked about the famous phone call that he himself had with the former attorney general during which he said there was no pressure and that he simply reminded the attorney general of the significance of her decision. There was nothing wrong with that. It is just the most senior public servant in Canada.

A few days earlier, the Prime Minister's principal adviser had set everything in motion. That is not a problem in the least. It is totally normal. Not to mention that, on September 17, the Prime Minister had a conversation with the former attorney general.

Canadians want the truth—the whole truth. The best way to get the truth is to allow the Prime Minister to testify in parliamentary committee.

● (1805)

Mr. Arif Virani (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments from the member opposite and his contribution to this debate.

When he appeared before the committee, Mr. Wernick said that the conversations with the former minister of justice were completely legal. He used the terms “lawful” and “appropriate”.

Since the member opposite represents a region in the beautiful province of Quebec, I would like to talk about how remediation agreements affect such a province. Paragraph 715.31(f) of the Criminal Code states that the purpose of such an agreement is:

to reduce the negative consequences of the wrongdoing for persons — employees, customers, pensioners and others — who did not engage in the wrongdoing, while holding responsible those individuals who did engage in that wrongdoing.

Does the member not agree that these provisions are designed to punish business executives who are responsible for criminal acts instead of the employees, who are not? Are these provisions not a valuable part of our Criminal Code?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I would like to once again compliment my hon. colleague on his French.

First, I never said that it was illegal or inappropriate for the top official in Canada to call the former attorney general. I simply said that he pressured her. Now, I would like to remind members of what it says on page 534 of the government's omnibus bill. Subsection 175.32(3) reads as follows:

...the prosecutor must not consider the national economic interest...

It is written in black and white. What happened, in the end? The company was notified of the decision of the director of public prosecutions on September 4. Political pressure was brought to bear after that. If the Liberals did not like that decision, all they had to do was take action beforehand. They did not abide by their own law and, to make matters worse, they did not respect the integrity of the director of public prosecutions.

Business of Supply

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent for reminding us of those facts. However, since those facts were already set out several times today, I would like to ask a related but somewhat different question.

Over the past few hours, days and soon to be weeks, the Liberals have been defending themselves by saying that remediation agreements protect jobs. If I wanted to introduce a measure to defend and protect jobs, I would not have inserted it into an omnibus budget implementation bill. I likely would have made a big deal about what I was doing to address the issue. However, this provision was hidden in an omnibus budget implementation bill.

Does this show that the Liberals are trying to give themselves tools to help friends of the party rather than defend Canadians?

• (1810)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his contribution to this debate.

Indeed, it was an omnibus budget implementation bill. This provision had absolutely nothing to do with the budget. The member is quite right. If the Liberal government was so proud of standing up for jobs, as it claims today, it would have been proud to say so, but that was not at all the case.

I will not quote subsection 175.32(3) of the bill again, since I have already done so three times this week, but I will quote the fourth paragraph of page 30 of the Liberal election platform, which deals with prorogation and omnibus bills:

We will not resort to legislative tricks to avoid scrutiny.

The Liberals also said they would not use omnibus bills, yet that is exactly what they did. Not only have they broken their election promises, but they also mocked Canadians' intelligence, trying to make them believe that they could do anything. That is not the case. If they want Canadians to get the truth, they will vote in favour of our motion and allow the Prime Minister to appear before the parliamentary committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before resuming debate, I must remind the hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley that I will be forced to interrupt him in about three minutes.

The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

[English]

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am glad to comment on this very important debate. We should all take some lesson in this. There is no satisfaction in a day on which the allegations against a sitting Prime Minister becomes so intense and important that the House of Commons seeks to call that Prime Minister under oath before a committee.

We are talking about incredibly serious allegations, about a Prime Minister's story that has changed almost on a daily basis, the story of very well-connected executives being able to lobby a government 50 times in less than a couple of years in order to get the federal laws changed to allow them a plea deal in a criminal investigation, in a criminal case, in which they have been found guilty of bribery and

fraud and the constant pressuring of the former attorney general, which may have gotten her fired for resisting.

For my Liberal colleagues to say that there is nothing to see here because the company did not yet get its plea deal, that it has not yet been successful, the attempt of that obstruction of justice is also a crime punishable by up to 10 years in jail.

I will quote somebody I think the Liberals might be interested in hearing from:

It's really frustrating to see the level of mistrust and disgust that Canadians are having towards Parliament, towards the prime minister right now. It's time the prime minister showed some leadership and actually came clean on everything he knew, and the only way we're going to be able to do that, unfortunately, is if everybody testifies under oath.

Who said that? The current Prime Minister. He believed that Prime Minister Harper needed to testify under oath because of a changing story, because the allegations in the Duffy-Wright affair were so significant that Canadians needed to understand that. The Liberals now say that they are different, that when corruption happens with the Liberals, they should not be held to the same standard as everybody else. That is exactly how the sponsorship scandal was born, bred and executed.

We are talking about power. The Liberals can continue to heckle, but voices will be heard. We are talking about a very powerful man, perhaps the most powerful man in Canada, the Prime Minister. He is using his solicitor-client privilege not to allow the former attorney general to speak her full truth, which she asked for just last week in the House of Commons. She wrote to the justice committee today. She says that until the Prime Minister is able to waive that privilege, she is unable to fully testify and explain what happened. The one who has the power to allow this indigenous woman, this indigenous leader to speak fully is the Prime Minister of Canada, the only person who has that power.

For someone who professed to Canadians that he would be different, that he believed in transparency, that he believed in the rule of law, the only person who could allow the full story to come to light is the Prime Minister. The irony must be rich for those Liberals, who have talked about transparency, reconciliation and being better than they have been in the past, to watch this whole scandal slowly and terribly unfold in front of their very eyes. We have a woman sitting in the House seeking to speak and a Prime Minister refusing to allow her to do so. If he has a good story to tell, then he can come in front of committee under oath and tell it.

• (1815)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Call in the members.

• (1840)

[*English*]

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

(*Division No. 995*)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif	Albas
Albrecht	Alleslev
Allison	Anderson
Arnold	Aubin
Barlow	Barrett
Barsalou-Duval	Benson
Benzen	Bergen
Berthold	Bezan
Block	Boutin-Sweet
Brassard	Brousseau
Cannings	Caron
Carrie	Chong
Choquette	Christopherson
Cooper	Cullen
Deltell	Diotte
Donnelly	Dreeschen
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona)
Dusseau	Duvall
Eglinski	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Fast	Finley
Fortin	Gallant
Genuis	Gourde
Harder	Hoback
Hughes	Jeneroux
Johns	Jolibois
Kelly	Kent
Kitchen	Kmiec
Kusie	Lake
Leitch	Liepert
Lloyd	Lobb
Lukiwski	MacGregor
MacKenzie	Maguire
Marcil	Masse (Windsor West)
Mathysen	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McColeman
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Motz
Nantel	Nater
Nicholson	Obhrai
Paul-Hus	Poillievre
Raitt	Ramsey
Rankin	Rayes
Reid	Rempel
Sansoucy	Saroya
Scheer	Shipley
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Strahl
Stubbs	Sweet
Tilson	Trost
Van Kesteren	Wagantall

Warawa
Waugh
Weir
Yurdiga

Aldag
Amos
Arseneault
Ayoub
Bagnell
Baylis
Bibeau
Blair
Bossio
Breton
Chagger
Cuzner
Damoff
Dhillon
Dubourg
Duguid
Ehsassi
Ellis
Eyking
Fergus
Finnigan
Fonseca
Fragiskatos
Fraser (Central Nova)
Gameau
Goldsmith-Jones
Gould
Hajdu
Hehr
Holland
Hutchings
Joly
Jowhari
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation)
Lebouthillier
Leslie
Lightbound
Long
MacAulay (Cardigan)
Maloney
May (Cambridge)
McDonald
McKay
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
Mendès
Mihychuk
Soeurs
Monsef
Morrissey
Nassif
Ng
Oliphant
O'Regan
Paradis
Peterson
Philpott
Poissant
Ratansi
Robillard
Rogers
Rota
Ruimy
Sahota
Samson
Sarai
Schieffe
Serré
Shanahan
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simms
Sorbara
Tan
Vandal

Business of Supply

Warkentin
Webber
Wong
Zimmer— 106

NAYS

Members

Alghabra
Anandasangaree
Arya
Badawey
Bains
Bennett
Bittle
Boissonnault
Bratina
Casey (Charlottetown)
Champagne
Dabrusin
Dhaliwal
Drouin
Duclos
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
El-Khoury
Erskine-Smith
Eyolfson
Fillmore
Fisher
Fortier
Fraser (West Nova)
Fuhr
Gerretsen
Goodale
Graham
Hébert
Hogg
Hussen
Iacono
Jordan
Khalid
Lametti
Lapointe
LeBlanc
Lefebvre
Levitt
Lockhart
Longfield
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Massé (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia)
McCrimmon
McGuinty
McKenna
McLeod (Northwest Territories)
Mendicino
Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-
Morneau
Murray
Nault
O'Connell
Oliver
Ouellette
Peschisolido
Petipas Taylor
Picard
Qualtrough
Rioux
Rodriguez
Romanado
Rudd
Rusnak
Saini
Sangha
Scarpaleggia
Schulte
Sgro
Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon)
Sikand
Sohi
Tabbara
Tassi
Vandenbeld

Adjournment Proceedings

Vaughan
Whalen
Wrzesnewskyj
Zahid — 155

Virani
Wilkinson
Young

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to follow up on a question I posed for the Minister of Canadian Heritage about journalists and media workers who were here in Ottawa at the time with a clear message to the Liberals: Journalism is in a crisis.

Government inaction is why newspapers and media outlets are closing and why journalists are losing their jobs. We all know there is so much that can be done to save local news and the government has the regulatory tools necessary to support journalists and media workers. It just needs to use them. One of those tools is the ability to have web giants such as Netflix, Facebook and Google pay their fair share in Canada. They are exempt from Canadian content contributions and this is causing a long, slow drain on the resources that are necessary to keep our local news strong and supported.

In fact, 80% of the advertising has migrated over to these digital platforms and this type of advertising has taken significant revenues out of the pockets of our local journalists and reporters and the ability for the ad buys in traditional media to support the very important work that they do. Other countries have taken the necessary steps to have these web giants pay their fair share when operating in their countries, including in the European Union, in Sweden and recently in New Zealand. Why have we not taken these same steps here in Canada?

We also need to keep our small-market newspapers strong. I represent small towns in my beautiful riding of Essex and I know how hard our local reporters are working. I would like to give a special shout-out to some of those who I see out working extremely hard all around the county: Shelby Wye at the Harrow News; Sylene Argent at the Essex Free Press; Matt Weingarden at the Lakeshore News; Ron Giofu at the River Town Times in Amherstburg; Nelson Santos at the Kingsville Reporter, who is also the mayor of Kingsville; and the LaSalle Post.

The Windsor Star also serves our area, but extreme cuts have left it with a skeleton of the once-vibrant newsroom it had. I know many reporters, like the brilliant Julie Kotsis-Wilder, who have watched their paper become a shadow of what it once was due to these cuts. That creates tremendous pressure on journalists because it is very difficult for them to do their work when there is so much pressure for them to produce content. We are starting to see that stories are not

able to be told because there simply are not the reporters there to go out and cover those stories.

CBC Windsor and CTV Windsor also have reporters who are running around our county trying to tell all of our stories, radio reporters, like Adelle Loiselle at Blackburn News and Rob Hindi at AM800, just to name a few. The stories they tell are the stories of our lives and so important to keep our communities connected and thriving. In particular in rural ridings, this is very critical. Often we have that large hub of news media in the nearest city, but for small towns this is the way they stay connected. They see what each other's children are doing. They talk about the important things that are happening in the town. The five municipalities I represent, extremely active municipalities, need their stories to be told and they need people to be able to access them.

It is becoming more and more difficult to tell these stories when the web giants are getting massive advertising dollars and a free ride on our system. I want to quote Jake Moore, who is the Unifor media chair. He was here in Ottawa at that time. He said:

It's time for the government to address the massive shift in advertising and subscription revenues now going to American media tech giants such as Facebook, Amazon, Netflix, Google, while Canada's cultural sector suffers....

Internet companies in Canada should be matching the financial contributions that cable TV companies make to the Canada Media Fund and the independent local TV news fund. New Democrats will continue to stand up for media, for workers and for journalists at a time when free press could not be more critical. When will the Liberals get the courage needed to act?

• (1845)

Mr. Andy Fillmore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Multiculturalism, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to continue the debate on the issue raised by my colleague, the hon. member for Essex.

[*Translation*]

The government recognizes that a reliable, local and dynamic ecosystem of news media is one of the pillars of democracy and that any government support of news media must not interfere with journalistic independence.

[*English*]

To this end, in its fall economic statement, the government announced three new initiatives in support of journalism, including two tax credits and a fiscal measure to encourage charitable donations to not-for-profit news organizations. The government also confirmed its \$50-million initiative over five years to support local journalism in underserved communities.

[*Translation*]

The government will continue to consider any proposal likely to improve how Canadians access reliable local news.

Canadians expect to be able to benefit from an open and innovative Internet and to have access to high-quality Canadian content in an ever-expanding digital world.

*Adjournment Proceedings**[English]*

New technology, like streaming services, has changed the way Canadians discover, access and consume content. Now more than ever, Canadians go online. To keep up with these changes, our legislative framework needs to be modernized so that Canadian creators, consumers and broadcasters can adapt and thrive in a changing environment.

[Translation]

In June 2018, as committed to in budget 2018, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development and the Minister of Canadian Heritage announced the launch of a review of the Broadcasting Act and the Telecommunications Act. The Radio-communication Act will also be reviewed.

[English]

The review will update and modernize the legislative framework in a balanced way that takes into account the realities of Canadian consumers, creators and broadcasters.

[Translation]

The review will examine how to best support the creation, production and distribution of Canadian content in both English and French. It will also focus on updating and modernizing the broadcasting system by determining how all stakeholders are reflected within it and can contribute to it.

[English]

It is important to find a way to support the continued creation and production of Canadian content.

[Translation]

Our legislation will be based on the very simple principle that those who participate in the system contribute to the system.

[English]

There will be no free rides.

Ms. Tracey Ramsey: Madam Speaker, as we speak, there is a conversation happening across our country about how critical independent media is. The fact of the matter is that papers are closing. We have had papers that are over a century old close. We have had hundreds of reporters, hundreds of journalists, lose their jobs. We need urgent action.

To be quite honest, the initiatives that the Liberals brought forward are not enough on their own to get us back to the place where we were. I recognize that things are shifting, media workers and journalists recognize that, but there are some concrete steps that need to be taken by the government.

One is tax incentives for Canadian advertisers to keep their media spends within Canada. Two is that the web giants pay their fair share. Why do they continue to get a free pass? Yes, we have shifted onto these platforms, but they need to pay their fair share. Three is matching the financial contributions that cable TV companies have made to the Canada Media Fund.

These are three critical important steps that the government could take in the upcoming budget.

[Translation]

Mr. Andy Fillmore: Madam Speaker, the review of the Telecommunications Act and the Broadcasting Act will be led by a panel of external experts made up of Janet Yale, Peter S. Grant, Hank Intven, Marina Pavlovic, Monique Simard, Monica Song and Pierre Trudel. They all have extensive knowledge and expertise in this area.

● (1850)

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Madam Speaker, in October 2018, I asked whether we were going to incur any penalties for the construction delays on the Champlain Bridge. These delays prove that P3s are not actually more effective.

I am not sure why, but at the time, the parliamentary secretary's answer was about safety. Today, I would therefore like to talk about sustainable infrastructure.

On February 12, 2019, I was in the village of Saint-Dominique in my riding, Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, where I held a press conference calling on the federal government to include criteria to promote sustainable infrastructure when awarding contracts.

I then had a discussion with the owners of a local family business, father and son Jacques and Frédéric Sylvestre, as well as project manager David Jodoin and R&D director Jean Dubrueil.

I was pleased to learn that this business from my riding supplied the concrete for the Champlain Bridge. Since it hopes to do the same for the REM and can guarantee its concrete for 125 years, I keep repeating that investing in sustainable infrastructure will pay off down the road. I do not understand why sustainability criteria are not taken into account when tenders are put out for federal government contracts.

A few weeks ago, the Liberals said that they were in infrastructure mode. It was high time. It is also time for them to be in sustainable infrastructure mode so that all the taxpayers' money is invested in high-quality, long-lasting infrastructure with little environmental impact. It is time for sustainable development to be included in requests for proposals.

It is important to acknowledge individual initiatives from companies in Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot. Roller-compacted concrete by the Saint-Dominique quarry is a perfect example of sustainable innovation. Infrastructure developed with rolled concrete is an example of an innovative process that everyone should be on board with, including the federal government.

From now on, we must design and build all our infrastructure based on sustainable performance criteria for the lifetime of the infrastructure and that includes the environmental, economic, and social cost, as much as it includes the cost of maintenance, restoration, or partial replacement as needed.

Recently at the Standing Committee on Transport, I asked the Parliamentary Budget Officer, Yves Giroux, about including a sustainability criterion in federal government requests for proposals. He said:

Adjournment Proceedings

In your example, this would ensure funding for projects that, at first glance, are a little more expensive but are more cost effective.

In light of this response, the NDP believes that the money required to build sustainable facilities must not be considered only as expenses. This money should be considered as sustainable investments that have significant economic spinoffs, that are environmentally sound and that minimize negative consequences for our communities.

Like my NDP colleague from Hochelaga, I think that we should ensure that the sustainable development criterion is applied when affordable and community housing is being built. Social housing is important for low-income Canadians. If the housing were to be built with sustainable materials, the upkeep would be cheaper and, again, it would undeniably be good for the environment.

In conclusion, the NDP and I believe that sustainable economic development is the future of infrastructure, public transit and social housing. It is clear that in the long term, a sustainable project makes financial and environmental sense.

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our priority is to get the Samuel de Champlain Bridge built without compromising the safety and security of the workers or the quality of the work.

We have made significant progress on this new bridge, and its structure is now basically complete. In December, the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities joined workers on the bridge deck to celebrate this milestone and to announce that the new structure will be called the Samuel de Champlain Bridge.

• (1855)

[English]

The next steps will be the permanent finishing work, including waterproofing and paving, which will begin in the spring when the necessary weather conditions permit it.

[Translation]

As the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities announced on October 25, 2018, the Samuel de Champlain Bridge will be open to traffic by June 2019 at the latest.

[English]

We continue to work closely with our private partner, Signature on the Saint Lawrence, or SSL, to ensure that the bridge is completed to the highest possible standards. At the same time, we are responsibly managing public funds and respecting the terms and conditions of the contract with SSL.

[Translation]

With regard to the contract with SSL and the penalties, the minister clearly indicated that there would be consequences.

We are currently negotiating certain elements with SSL, and we will communicate the results with the public in an open and transparent manner.

[English]

When people are in Montreal, they will see that this signature project is taking shape. We recognize the hard work and determination of all workers to complete the construction of this signature bridge for the greater Montreal area, which will serve bridge users for generations to come.

[Translation]

We thank all those who worked on the project. We look forward to the opening of the bridge, which will take place later this year.

Ms. Brigitte Sansoucy: Madam Speaker, I would like to commend all those who worked on the magnificent Samuel de Champlain Bridge. I must admit that it looks very nice.

Two infrastructure and communities ministers appeared before the committee in the past year. With regard to the Champlain Bridge, I asked both of them how the world still has pyramids and why we cannot build a bridge that lasts more than 50 years.

I sincerely hope that the Samuel de Champlain Bridge will last more than 100 years. We need sustainable infrastructure, and I encourage the government to include sustainability criteria in all calls for tenders.

Mr. Marco Mendicino: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her remarks.

[English]

It is the Government of Canada's priority to deliver a bridge that is safe for Canadians and one that will endure for many years to come. Like my colleague, I hope it will endure for as long as the pyramids have stood.

It is our responsibility to make sure that we build a bridge that will be as safe as it is spectacular, and we are doing just that.

We have worked closely with our private partner, SSL, through this project, and the progress we have made to date is obvious to all who pass by the construction site.

[Translation]

The Samuel de Champlain bridge will be open to traffic as soon as possible, by June 2019 at the latest, and the existing bridge will remain in use until then.

[English]

We will continue to work closely with SSL to ensure a quality, toll-free, new Champlain bridge without compromising the safety of workers and the public and while ensuring sound management of taxpayers' money.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, Londoners remain haunted by the indecision and lack of clarity on the part of the government surrounding the Saudi LAV contract at General Dynamics. While some believe it comes down to a choice between sustainable jobs and respect for human rights, I believe there is a third alternative.

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Instead of his typical spin, why does the Prime Minister not research his commitments under the contract, determine whether financial penalties exist, calculate the number of vehicles remaining to be shipped and on what platforms the LAVs are built. The Prime Minister must be clear as to what protections he will provide to Canadian workers and the community caught in this mess, which was created by his Liberal government and the previous Conservative government.

None of this is the fault of workers, and workers should not suffer in the fallout. The Prime Minister should be able to find alternative reliable customers for the contract. Canada plans to buy military trucks from the United States, so why not call upon General Dynamics to fill this \$2-billion order instead?

Our military is not properly equipped for foreign and domestic missions. The government can change that by purchasing any remaining LAVs for our military and selling or leasing the surplus to countries engaged in peacekeeping. Bulgaria, for instance, is in need of the kind of world-class vehicles produced by General Dynamics.

If there are any substantial financial penalties imposed by the Saudis, the Prime Minister can invoke the Magnitsky act and target Saudi assets to minimize reprisals or recoup the lost funds. The Prime Minister also has the ability to create a transition fund for General Dynamics workers and others affected by this contract.

Southwestern Ontario needs a manufacturing strategy that will return people to work and restore abandoned factories to full production. Canada lags far behind the rest of the industrial world, with no substantive digital high-tech communications strategy. The government must make investments in technology, innovation and training for workers to be competitive in the world market.

My community of London, Ontario, has the high-tech manufacturing infrastructure to advance a manufacturing strategy, one that is long overdue, and the intellectual infrastructure of Fanshawe College and Western University to support it.

The government's lack of leadership has created anxiety and uncertainty for Londoners, workers and their families at General Dynamics, and the satellite industry of suppliers providing General Dynamics with goods and services. It is long past time for the Liberals to announce a clear plan to protect the jobs and futures of our workers and the broader community. Canadians deserve workable federal action now.

We know that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its crown prince are unreliable customers who have committed human rights offences, bombed Saudi citizens, committed brutal executions and imprisoned and tortured human rights advocates. They have created a war-induced famine that threatens the starvation deaths of 14 million people in Yemen, murdered critics and discontinued diplomatic relations. They have withheld payment of \$1.8 billion for the Canadian-built LAVs.

The Prime Minister and the government have indicated that they will sign the Arms Trade Treaty, which precludes Canada from selling or exporting armaments to human rights abusers. In August 2015, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper told the media that Canada must stop arms sales to regimes that flout democracy, such as Saudi Arabia.

Given our international obligations to defend human rights and plan to sign the Arms Trade Treaty, the government may be forced to cancel the LAV contract. Sadly, the Prime Minister has failed to show the leadership to deal with this problem. Saudi human rights abuses are not going to end any time soon. This controversy is not going away. The government must be proactive and provide solutions to this crisis.

● (1900)

Ms. Pamela Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Consular Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, human rights are central to our foreign policy. As Canadians, we value our freedom, democracy and the rights guaranteed to us by our charter. However, not everyone is as fortunate. Many people are denied the right to live their lives as they wish. This can especially be the case for women around the world, who are forced to live as second-class citizens. We are using our voices as Canadians to speak up in the defence of human rights, even when it can be very difficult to do so.

Our position on human rights, including women's rights, in Saudi Arabia is very clear. It is a position that we have advocated for in public and in private since we came to office. This dialogue is critical to international diplomacy, because it establishes a common understanding about the value we place on ourselves, on our fellow citizens and on humankind.

That is also why Canada has taken such a strong stance on the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. We are gravely concerned about the involvement of the Saudi government in this extraterritorial murder. The killing of dissidents is horrific and shocking, and it cannot be allowed to go uninvestigated. Murderers cannot enjoy impunity and immunity from consequences. We have demanded a full accounting of the killing in an independent international investigation.

Canada is not alone in this matter. Under our leadership, the foreign ministers of the G7 countries have made two separate statements on Mr. Khashoggi's murder.

Canadians expect that our country's foreign policy respects our values. This is why we have committed to stronger and more vigorous arms export controls. That is why we passed Bill C-47, which will allow us to accede to the Arms Trade Treaty and also implement measures to ensure that Canadian arms exports are not used in unacceptable ways.

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We have consulted on these changes with industry as well as with civil society. Canadian arms manufacturers also want to ensure that their goods are not misused abroad. The Canadian Association of Defence and Security Industries supports our accession to the Arms Trade Treaty, which puts the treaty criteria, including human rights, directly into legislation. Those were the same changes that the member opposite voted against. She and her NDP colleagues voted against including human rights and gender-based violence as considerations in our arms export system.

Unlike the NDP, we live up to our principles. We are committed to supporting our strong defence industry and the important jobs that it supports. That also includes the significant investments across Canada that we make in our industries. Our government will always support Canadian workers and industries and defend their interests at home and abroad.

● (1905)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Madam Speaker, it is an arms export system that is totally inadequate. What about the millions of other victims of the Saudis?

I repeat my question of October 25. Freedom, equality, justice and peace are Canadian values. We have a deal with the Saudis that enables them to wage war, silence dissidents and harm innocent civilians, a deal signed by the Conservatives and upheld by the Liberals.

Canadians do not want to be complicit with Saudi Arabia's war crimes. The current government has a responsibility to fundamental

human rights and an absolute obligation to stand up for Canadian workers.

We need to protect our communities. If the Liberals can protect bank profits and tax haven friends, they can protect the hard-working men and women of London, because they are worth it.

What is the Liberal plan for protecting workers and their families in light of this mess?

Ms. Pamela Goldsmith-Jones: Madam Speaker, we strongly condemn the horrible murder of Jamal Khashoggi and are deeply concerned by reports on the participation of Saudi officials. We strongly demand and expect that Canadian arms exports be used in a way that fully respects human rights. That is why our government is committed to a stronger and more rigorous arms export system and to the Arms Trade Treaty, which contrasts completely with the member opposite.

As the Prime Minister has said, we are actively reviewing existing export permits to Saudi Arabia.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:07 p.m.)

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