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Tuesday, June 15, 2021

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 15, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[Translation]

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICS COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: It is my duty to lay upon the table, pursuant to section 28 of Appendix 1 to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, a report from the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner entitled “Ratansi Report”, dated June 2021.

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[English]

COMMISSIONER OF LOBBYING

The Speaker: It is my duty to lay upon the table, pursuant to section 11 of the Lobbying Act, the Commissioner of Lobbying report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2021.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

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INFORMATION COMMISSIONER

The Speaker: It is my duty to lay upon the table, pursuant to subsection 40(1) of the Access to Information Act, the report of the Information Commissioner for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2021.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(h), this report is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics.

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GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen’s Privy Council for Canada and Minister of

Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government’s response to seven petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

* * *

[Translation]

ACT FOR THE SUBSTANTIVE EQUALITY OF FRENCH AND ENGLISH AND THE STRENGTHENING OF THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-32, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

* * *

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, entitled “Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Government’s Ability to Deliver Information and Services in Both Official Languages”.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

[English]

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, regarding support programs for veterans, caregivers and families.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

I would like to thank our clerk and all of the staff who have allowed us to continue our work virtually this past year.

Routine Proceedings

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, entitled “Challenges Faced by Women Living in Rural, Remote and Northern Communities in Canada”.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

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PETITIONS

TRAVEL ADVISERS

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I had the honour of speaking with over a dozen travel agents and I have three petitions to present.

The petitioners call upon this House to recognize the negative impact COVID travel restrictions have had on the economic situations of travel advisers, especially independent travel advisers. They call upon the House to respond with sector-specific remedies until travel resumes for a sufficiently long time to ensure a return to a sustainable income flow.

The petitioners call for the continuation of the CRB at \$500 per week for six months past the full-time resumption of travel. Further, they call for sole proprietors to be qualified for the RRRF in urban areas. Finally, they ask the House to ensure that any financial assistance to airlines and their subsidiary travel companies will be conditional on the protection of travel advisers' commissions and that any commissions already clawed back be repaid to travel advisers.

• (1010)

CANADA CHILD BENEFIT

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to present a petition started by the Willowdale Community Legal Services and signed by hundreds of Canadians across the country.

The petitioners are concerned about the current Canada child benefit legislation, which denies many children who are residents of Canada, including those who are Canadian-born, access to the Canada child benefit payment because of the immigration status of their parents. The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to reduce child poverty and alleviate the hardships faced by children and women in Canada by allowing all children who are residents of Canada access to Canada child benefit payments irrespective of the immigration status of their parents.

I am pleased to present this petition and proud to support it.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition virtually on behalf of my constituents in Kootenay—Columbia. The signatures on this petition were submitted out of great concern by my constituents in Kootenay—Columbia regarding the Columbia River Treaty.

The petitioners, therefore, call on the Government of Canada to act as follows. The Columbia River Treaty impacts the lives of all

Kootenay—Columbians. The federal, provincial and regional governments have varying levels of responsibility for the protection of Canadian interests with all aspects of the Columbia River Treaty negotiations. The Columbia River Treaty requires the co-operative development of water resources, flood risk management, power generation and recreation, like Lake Koocanusa.

The treaty displaced over 280,000 acres of ecosystem, including local farmers, ranchers and indigenous communities. They call upon the Government of Canada to focus on the importance of the Columbia River Treaty and to meet the priority, development and planning of the construction of a weir on the Canadian side of the international border on Lake Koocanusa, British Columbia.

I support this petition and present it to the House of Commons on behalf of my constituents in Kootenay—Columbia.

HEALTH

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to present two petitions this morning.

The first petition is from many constituents concerned about the shortage of family doctors and how 92% of family doctors in this country are in urban areas and only 8% are found in more rural and remote areas, such as where I live. On a brief parenthetical personal note, I am going to have a knee replacement tomorrow, so I will not be in the House. My family doctor remains in Ottawa because I was not able to find one in Saanich—Gulf Islands 12 years ago when I moved here.

The petitioners ask for the federal government, recognizing that this is provincial jurisdiction, to develop a holistic, full-on effort, working with provinces and territories, to find a fair and holistic solution to the acute shortage of family doctors in much of Canada.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition speaks to an issue that we have heard about in this House frequently in recent weeks, and that is the critical declining area of our forests comprising old-growth forests. The petitioners note that there are solutions to protecting what is left. Less than 2.7% of British Columbia forests, for example, are in old-growth condition. Old growth fosters biodiversity, and it is a major sink for carbon. It could be part of Canada's federal plans for protecting biodiversity, protecting carbon and keeping it out of the atmosphere.

The petitioners note that solutions in value-added forest products, in collaboration with first nations, could create part of our path to reconciliation while preserving old-growth forests. In short, the petitioners call for a halt on all old-growth logging across Canada.

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1015)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—AMENDMENT TO SECTION 45 OF THE CONSTITUTION AND QUEBEC, A FRENCH-SPEAKING NATION

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ) moved:

That the House agree that section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, grants Quebec and the provinces exclusive jurisdiction to amend their respective constitutions and acknowledge the will of Quebec to enshrine in its constitution that Quebecers form a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that it is also the common language of the Quebec nation.

He said: Mr. Speaker, you have inspired me to read the motion again, as I find it rather poetic.

That the House agree [the use of the word “agree” was no accident] that section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, grants Quebec and the provinces exclusive jurisdiction to amend their respective constitutions and acknowledge the will of Quebec to enshrine in its constitution that Quebecers form a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that it is also the common language of the Quebec nation.

Although it has been 30 years since the Bloc Québécois was created, there are still people in the nation next door who think they need to rewrite their own laws to enshrine French, and only French, as Quebec's official language. This is because, 30 years later, there is still that much to be done, not to mention gaining independence.

Quebec is totally and entirely entitled and justified to tell anyone listening and anyone else, in every forum and soon every forum around the world, that it is a French nation whose only official language is French. I would remind all these fine people that this has been the case since 1974. When I was a boy in short pants French was already the only official language of Quebec. It feels like some members of the House just discovered that the Earth is round, although I am told that a few people here are not so sure. The common language has more weight than the official language. The common language is the one we use when we are walking down the street and we encounter someone we do not know.

The great tragedy of the French language in Quebec is when a young francophone encounters another young francophone at the corner of Peel and Sainte-Catherine and they carry on in English without understanding the history behind that reality, without understanding what brought them there, without understanding the sometimes uncertain compromises made, the humiliations of histo-

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ry, the strong affirmations and the emergence of an extraordinary culture. Two young francophones speaking to each other in English in the street is the antithesis of recognizing the wonderful contribution of a Leonard Cohen to Quebec culture. What makes us who we are completes us. We can never give up who we are.

Today is a very special day. Some would say that it is rather singular to be celebrating it in this place, but that is where our friendly struggles have brought us. This day will be celebrated in the hearts of the millions of Quebecers who recognize themselves in our cause. We are celebrating the 30th anniversary of the creation of the Bloc Québécois.

In this day and age, it is no longer appropriate to see individuals as being more than human, especially if they are still living. However, I am in a position to speak to, as humbly as possible, the stature of a certain Lucien Bouchard and to assess all that he relinquished, all the courage he showed 30 years ago to create what one day history will call one of the essential tools for making Quebec a full sovereign nation. We have an obligation to be humble, each one of us in this place, in Parliament, online, all the workers, the hard-working men and women here and elsewhere, the supporters, the Quebecers engaged in this desire to complete a journey that began with the Quiet Revolution.

• (1020)

Although we recognize that we must be humble, we also have the right to show our pride. We are a fine bunch; we are the bunch who cheerfully refuse to disappear. We are those they say will not exist. We are told over and over that the Bloc Québécois is finished, just as we are told over and over that independence is finished. Well, these naysayers keep having to roll up their sleeves because our objective is sound, noble and legitimate.

However, it will never be more and it will never be better than what has been done by those who came before us in Parliament's House of Commons, which, I say with no enmity, will always be foreign to us. If we wish it, it will be temporary.

Today Parliament is going to properly debate a very important motion, not just surreptitiously dispose of it. Quebec is navigating through the maze of documents that were designed to make it wither away. Those same documents indicate that it is time to acknowledge and note down the fact that Quebec is a nation.

Quebec is not a nation within a united Canada. That does not mean anything. Quebec is a whole, entire, thriving, complete, vibrant, beautiful, and up and coming French nation. No other language can even begin to compare to the heritage, beauty, allure and poetry of French. No wonder there was a baby boom in Quebec. These things start with flattering words, and French has much to offer in that regard.

Members were able to refuse the motion that we moved at the end of May with a simple “nay”, but today it will not be so easy. We are pleased to make two observations. First, we think that the motion will be adopted. We will be pleased to accept it because it is very good thing.

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Second, without this great group of 32 passionate people, the motion never would have been adopted. It would have never even existed, and Quebec would have never been able to identify with it to this extent. This group decided to make this proposal to Ottawa. It did not want to be received with indifference and actions that would later go against it. This is not a legal approach that we have initiated, not at all. It is also not an approach that involves interpretation, a scope of interpretation or “interpretativity”. It is a political approach. Take it or leave it. It is political.

We are putting this Parliament in a position where it will be forced to effectively take note of the fact that Quebec is affirming that we are a French nation. I would dare say that Parliament should do that in a humble way, which is not something it is often known for.

There will be consequences. The government cannot go on forever hiding behind an assortment of judges who have also been hidden behind a charter that was designed to counter the will of Quebec and the Quebec National Assembly. Beyond all of that, there is the will of elected officials from across Canada and Quebec.

When the time comes to do something, someone will have to show some consistency. The government cannot recognize the French-speaking Quebec nation, take money from Quebecers and give it to people who want to challenge and oppose the French-speaking Quebec nation. Now, it does happen, and there have been some inconsistencies, but we will expose the people who deserve to be exposed.

• (1025)

I want to say something that might sound a little harsh, but that is not my intention. The government's new, multi-page slogan is called the modernization of the Official Languages Act. I think I can say that this is not something we will be debating here. This bill will not go anywhere. It is essentially a second document filled with statements and hypothetical plans that will only happen if the Liberal government has a minority. We shall see what makes it into the rewritten version if they ever win a majority.

We do not even know what it is all about. It is starting out with private briefings, and we do not know what the Minister of Official Languages plans to include in her bill. We do know that it will apparently recognize French as the official language of Quebec. A round of applause for acknowledging what we all have known for 50 years. People who are better informed than me have reported that it essentially copies what would be in Quebec's hypothetical Bill 96, with respect to making federally regulated companies and institutions subject to the Charter of the French Language.

First of all, the two laws would say the same thing, but the federal law would take precedence. Why? It is because in real life, from the Canadian and federal perspective, Quebec is a vassal state. If we do not agree, I decide. That is what Canada is, even in terms of language, identity, values and culture. That speaks volumes.

We are talking about a government that cannot even hope to pass amendments to the Broadcasting Act, which was thankfully and greatly improved thanks to my friend the member for Drummond's efforts; a government that cannot even get its budget implementa-

tion bill passed, when there is probably someone out there shopping for a bus and a couple of planes.

It is quite ironic to see who the government is turning to. It is turning to the leader of the Bloc Québécois to say we are in a peck of trouble, that we are good people, that we still have a lot in common and that we will to work to make it work. These people have come to tell us that they will be deciding how to manage our language, our values, our identity, our culture and our nationhood and that is really nice of them, but no thanks. We are going to do it ourselves.

Now let us talk about timelines. The Minister of Official Languages is going to introduce an official languages bill that would, among other things, seek to replicate what will eventually be prescribed by Bill 96, which amends Quebec's Charter of the French Language to make federal institutions and businesses subject to the Charter of the French Language.

I am a good guy, and I would like to save her the effort. First of all, the parliamentary session of the House of Commons will surely be over before anyone even begins to look at the purely legislative side of things. There is a very good chance that this Parliament will be over too, so it will not happen in the foreseeable future. Let us not hold our breath.

In the meantime, two things will happen. First, in all likelihood this fall, the Quebec National Assembly will vote on what will, depending on the will of the elected representatives of the Quebec National Assembly alone, become Bill 96, and the Charter of the French Language in Quebec will henceforth apply to institutions and businesses under federal jurisdiction. The fall seems a bit far off, so we are going to move faster than that.

Tomorrow, the bill introduced by my esteemed colleague from Beauport—Limouilou, which would subject federal institutions and businesses in Quebec to the Charter of the French Language, will be put to a vote in the House of Commons. We are going to save a lot of time, avoid a ton of double-dealing and vote on this bill tomorrow. It will be done. We will be able to say thank you, goodbye. It will be dealt with, and we will be able to move on to another issue.

• (1030)

The House will have an opportunity tomorrow to move forward with a bill that would make federally regulated institutions and businesses subject to the Charter of the French Language, as called for by the Quebec National Assembly. Is that not wonderful?

Why not make the most of this opportunity? I must admit that it would have the disadvantage of stealing a bit of our thunder in terms of scoring political points in the run-up to the election. That is a bit of a shame, but it should not be the priority.

It is also important to point out that before anyone spoke French in New France, English on the shores of the United States, or Spanish on the southern islands or in Louisiana, North and South America were home to dozens and dozens of nations, each of them no less a nation than ours are today. They have their own histories, languages and cultures. That is always worth mentioning. We wanted to amend the motion to that effect, and some members from other parties suggested it, but others were not willing to let us do so.

When we have our great debates that, let us face it, pit French against English, we do not always mention it, but we should always give indigenous languages—I hate to say a specific status, because that term is so misused, but a factual, institutional and friendly respect that shelters them from all our debates that, from the perspective of these great cultures, only just arrived on their continent.

Before I conclude, I would like to encourage the minister to do something useful with the Official Languages Act. Some might interpret that to mean that I am implying she is addressing things that are not useful and, well, they are right. Quebec does not need anyone at any time to tell it how to promote and protect its language, culture, arts, identity and values. What it badly needs is for those who are not involved to mind their own business and keep their noses out of ours.

Instead, those resources should be invested, willingly, happily and generously, to support Acadian communities and francophone communities outside Quebec, which need them badly. No doubt people will tell us that anglophones in Quebec also badly need to be protected. I say this without malice. I confess I do not get up in the morning worrying about the survival of the English language in Quebec. I think it is doing quite well, and I am happy for it. The day Canada treats its French and Acadian minorities as well, as generously, and as warmly as Quebec has historically treated its English minority, the debate will be quite different. God knows we are not there yet.

Whatever Quebecers decide to do with their nation, their state, their language, their culture, their values and their history, the result will be a resolutely French nation. I say this both in friendship and as a bit of a warning: No one is going to stand in Quebec's way. No one will succeed. The joyous, dynamic, festive, colourful, culinary and musical resilience of Quebecers is unstoppable. As history will show, today will be a milestone in the protection of this nation, which will one day be called upon once more to take its destiny in its own hands, and the sooner the better.

• (1035)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened very closely to what the leader of the Bloc had to say and I really believe that he underestimates or undervalues the passion that people have for Quebec. I am thinking in particular of the Prairies, where many people, including me, have a very strong love for the province. We want Quebec to retain its heritage. The French language is a beautiful language.

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I am wondering if the member could provide his thoughts in regard to the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who have a passion for the province of Quebec and who want Quebec to retain French as its common language.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, who could forget the extraordinary outpouring of deep love from Canada just before the 1995 referendum, when tens of thousands of Canadians violated all the rules of democracy? It was a scam of historic proportions, during which the streets of Quebec were inundated with Canadian flags and declarations of love that vanished just as quickly as they had appeared. I for one have not forgotten.

I invite the member to pose his question about love for the French language out west, to the Métis.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the leader of the Bloc Québécois for his speech and his motion.

We are talking about a motion to recognize that Quebec has the jurisdiction to amend its section of the Constitution to state that Quebecers form a nation, which is recognized by the House of Commons and by the NDP in its platform, and that French is the only official language of Quebec. As my colleague pointed out, this has been the case since 1974, when Robert Bourassa was premier. These are all indisputable facts. In addition, this motion is non-binding.

What is the point of tabling a motion on something that everyone agrees on?

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, I am a little excited. I presume that, from now on, everyone in the House will agree when the Bloc Québécois puts forth proposals asserting Quebec's exclusive jurisdiction, not only in the areas of language, culture, art and who we are, but in everything concerning the Quebec nation, including certain exclusive jurisdictions.

Take pharmacare or dental care, which there is somewhat of a tendency to want to centralize. In this context, not all NDP members read the Sherbrooke declaration closely. Still, we will let bygones be bygones. We will see what happens in future votes.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the leader of the Bloc Québécois.

I would also like to congratulate the Bloc on its anniversary. I had the honour of working with Lucien Bouchard when he was the federal environment minister. In my opinion, he is still the best environment minister Canada ever had.

I would like to say that the Green Party totally agrees with the need to protect the French language and Quebec culture for Quebecers and for everyone across Canada who benefits from that extraordinary culture.

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However, I have a problem. I studied law and constitutional law when I was younger, so I understand the Canadian Constitution. I do not see any problems with the aim of Bill 96, but if any other members of the House have any articles by experts, I would appreciate it if they could share them with us, because I cannot get any further in my research. I think that it is ultra vires of the province to make a change to the Canadian Constitution.

In my opinion, it is a—

• (1040)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, debate is a healthy exercise in politics. Reflection is also a healthy exercise.

Let us say that more than 330 out of 338 members of Parliament agree on a motion; I think it is fairly safe to assume that when it is 30:1, it is not the 29 who are wrong.

Out of respect and the affection that everyone is so keen to express toward the Quebec nation, I invite the hon. member to reconsider and to acknowledge that French is in a unique position in Quebec, but it goes far beyond that. It is a question of recognizing a nation; despite the fact that it was conquered, it remains, resolutely and obstinately—and Lord knows we are obstinate—a nation.

Mr. Bouchard was without a doubt a great environment minister. In our 30-year or 60-year history, we had René Lévesque, Jacques Parizeau, Pauline Marois, Bernard Landry and many other great politicians. We also had Gilles Duceppe, my friend and predecessor. It is true that Lucien Bouchard was a great environment minister but, more than that, he was a great sovereignist leader.

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech.

[English]

Does the leader of the Bloc believe that the ability to amend the Constitution affects all provinces or just Quebec?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, I wish everyone the same happiness I wish for us.

I think that, in theory, beyond the intricacies of the Charlottetown accord, had the exercise been more sincere and taken more seriously, we would have had a confederation of autonomous territories and, unlike what we see every day now, the provinces would not be creatures of Ottawa, but the other way round. That would have required going against the grain and showing a bit of humility, but, as a result, every person, every community, every people and, especially, every nation claiming the right to self-determination—this includes francophone communities outside Quebec and the Acadian nation, which I love—will always have my personal support, as well as that of the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, at one point or another, we have all seen unflattering and unhelpful remarks in social media, but there is something we, and especially my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois, see a lot. It is called Quebec

bashing. In fact, it is a national sport for some, which consists in knocking Quebec indiscriminately.

I would like to thank my leader for his speech. It was inspirational as always.

Does he think that the fact that the House of Commons recognizes Quebec as a nation whose common and only official language is French could help educate and influence Canadians in the right direction, which would make relations between our two nations even more pleasant and cordial?

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, a little earlier, I mentioned two young francophones who were speaking English to each other on the corner of Peel and St. Catherine. I dream of two young people from anywhere in the world meeting on a street corner in Rimouski and greeting each other in French.

When this happens, when it becomes normal and an everyday occurrence, when Quebec is fully accepted for what it is, we will be a wonderful neighbour to Canada, and we will do so much together, more than with anyone else. Social media will no longer have a reason to bash us.

• (1045)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to start by saying that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Mont-Royal.

I am very pleased to be participating in today's debate. It is in a way the continuation of a debate held in the House in 2006 when I was a young member of Parliament. Well, at least I was a little younger than I am now, and my hair was not quite so white. It was an important debate for me because we were preparing to vote in favour of recognizing the Quebec nation. Obviously, I voted in favour of the motion because, in my opinion, it is a simple fact.

We had had an extremely interesting debate, and I remember very clearly that the vast majority of the members present voted in favour of the motion recognizing that Quebecers form a nation within a united Canada.

My former colleague Stéphane Dion aptly summarized the conclusion of the debate. He said, “we all agree on what is basic in this, which is, for those who are Quebecers, that we are proud to be Quebecers and Canadians, and that other Canadians are proud to have Quebec as part of their country.” As a result, the debate in the House of Commons on the recognition that Quebecers form a nation within a united Canada was held and settled in 2006.

The Bloc Québécois may not like what I am about to say, because they would prefer an argument. We clearly recognize that French is the official language of Quebec. I will say it again: French is the official language of Quebec. We also recognize the key role that Bill 101, or the Charter of the French Language, has played in preserving and strengthening the French language in Quebec. I have always supported Bill 101. Since we wish to modernize the Official Languages Act, we understand and respect the Quebec government's desire to do the same with the Charter of the French Language.

With respect to Quebec's desire to enshrine this symbolic recognition in the province's constitution, I think I can safely say that Quebec has a certain amount of leeway that allows it to make changes, provided it is clearly stated that the suggested amendments cannot directly or indirectly modify the scope of the provisions of the Canadian Constitution. We all agree on that.

In other words, it must be stated that the Quebec government's bill does not erode other laws that protect the language rights of the English-speaking community in Quebec. Obviously, there will be several debates in Quebec's National Assembly and throughout Quebec on this very important topic. I will follow these debates with a great deal of interest.

Although it is true that symbols are important, it is also true that actions are even more important. Actions speak louder than words. The government has signalled its intention to take action to counter the decline of French across the country. In fact, our ambitions are not limited to countering the decline of French. We want to take action to encourage people to learn and use French and to foster the development of francophone communities across the country.

In the throne speech and budget 2021, we clearly stated that we are responsible for protecting and promoting the French language, not only outside Quebec, but in Quebec as well, while continuing to fully respect the rights of the English-speaking minority.

The reason I am talking about the need to protect French in Quebec is that French is in decline even in Quebec, especially in the greater Montreal area. That decline can sometimes be seen in the way people are greeted in shops and restaurants. It can be seen on some signs and heard on the street and on the radio. It can be seen in the statistics on the decline of French and rise of English, particularly in both public- and private-sector workplaces.

As a Quebecker and a Canadian, I am very concerned about the decline of French, and so is the government. I know that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Official Languages are especially concerned. Every member of the House who wants to protect a fundamental trait of our country, namely the existence of two official languages, should be concerned. Allow me to make it clear that the federal government wants to protect and promote French.

• (1050)

That desire to act on all fronts is written in black and white in the bill that my colleague, the Minister of Official Languages, tabled in the House. The federal government will protect French by taking action in federally regulated sectors, which include banks and communications and transportation companies. All federally regulated employers, of which there are about 18,000, will have linguistic

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obligations, not only in Quebec, but also in regions with a strong francophone presence outside Quebec.

Drawing inspiration from the Charter of the French Language, we will pass laws on the right to be served and to work in French in federally regulated private businesses in Quebec and in regions with a strong francophone presence across Canada. That is a significant step. We will be creating language-of-work and language-of-service rights that will foster the use of French in Quebec and across Canada. We are doing this because we recognize that we need to do more to support French and to achieve real equality between the two official languages.

To quote Aristotle, "The worst form of inequality is to try to make unequal things equal." Facts are facts, and the fact is that French is not equal to English in our country and even less so in North America. As noted in the throne speech, Canada's approximately eight million francophones are surrounded by an ocean of more than 360 million primarily anglophone inhabitants of North America. As such, it is our responsibility to take action in areas within our purview to protect that minority and ourselves.

I want to stress that the reform we are proposing would in no way curtail the rights of Quebec's anglophone minority. I do not think the Bloc Québécois or anyone else wants that. However, we do know that if the French language is to continue to thrive in Quebec—and this is even more so the case outside Quebec—precise, vigorous and ambitious measures must be instituted immediately. That is what we will do, and we will also be working on a number of fronts. For instance, we will lean on cultural institutions such as Telefilm Canada, the National Film Board of Canada, and CBC/Radio-Canada, requiring them to support French-language content.

We will adopt measures to promote francophone immigration to try to counter the very worrisome trend of declining francophone demographics in the country. We will increase French-language learning opportunities for all Canadians. We will make it official policy to appoint bilingual justices to the Supreme Court of Canada, a move the Conservatives oppose, for some reason. We will strengthen some of the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages, and much more.

The reason I mentioned jurisdiction earlier is that, as the Liberal party's Quebec's lieutenant, it is fundamental to me. Jurisdictions must be respected and that is why, whether it is the right to work in French in federally regulated businesses or the right to be informed and served in French by those same businesses, we are clearly acting within our jurisdictions. Not only are we acting clearly, but we will act clearly in our areas of jurisdiction.

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At the same time, this measure we have included in our bill to modernize the Official Languages Act affords us a prime opportunity to work closely with the Quebec government. If we want the new federal system to coexist with the French-language requirements, we need to work together and we want to. That is what underpins what we are doing and that is what is written into the bill. That is also the spirit of the bill, this willingness to work with Quebec to strengthen and promote French, the language that I cherish, that we cherish and that is so beautiful. We must do more to protect it, to share it and to strengthen it.

• (1055)

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, one evening during this parliamentary session when the report on the decline of French in Quebec was published, I thought I heard members saying how much they loved French. I get the same impression from the speech that the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons just gave.

In Quebec, we cherish and cultivate French. It is something that we are proud of because it is a key component of living together. Why is the federal government giving this so much attention and taking so many precautions rather than letting us govern our French language with our charter? Why did the federal government contribute to the decline of this beautiful common language in Quebec—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, from the outset, I want to say that the Bloc Québécois does not have a monopoly on loving Quebec and the French language.

French is in my blood. It is in my veins. It is something essential for me and for the government.

With regard to the right to work or be served in French, we are going to take action in areas under our own jurisdiction. Limiting the debate on strengthening French to that means limiting the scope of the debate. We need to invest in our culture, in French-speaking immigration and so on. The government is going to do that.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I always enjoy listening to the speeches of my colleague, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

I must say that there is a huge contradiction between his words and the government's lack of action. The government waited six years before finally introducing—and it had to be pushed—a modernization of the Official Languages Act. I could tell him that we have seen the impact of underfunding francophone programs and institutions here, in British Columbia, as elsewhere in Canada. There were also Liberal members who disputed the fact that French was being threatened.

I understood my colleague's speech, and it was a good one.

When will the government finally admit that French is threatened and start funding francophone institutions and take steps to put its fine words into action?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague.

Note the exceptional quality of his French. It is not only the quality of his French, but also the fact that he uses it all the time. As a result of that, we have meetings of House leaders in French. I think that is historic. When we—the representatives of the four parties—meet and discuss, it is in French. I do not think this has ever been done so regularly in French. It is thanks to my colleague's efforts and his love for French.

I will answer his question. I mentioned it earlier, and we said it in the Speech from the Throne, that we had to work on French, not just in Quebec, but across Canada. We have introduced a bill that includes very strong measures to strengthen and promote French throughout Canada, and we are investing massively in both official languages.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons for his speech.

I noticed that he spoke of the importance of taking action instead of just talking. That is actually one of our biggest criticisms about the current government. It is important to protect francophone culture. I know that many members of the House really care about the French language. They have often demonstrated it. What I am wondering is whether the government genuinely wants to take action on it.

It seems to me the government is always in reaction mode. When Quebec introduces a bill to protect the French language, the government hurries to introduce one of its own. I would like the government leader to reassure me that the Liberals genuinely intend on moving forward with protecting the French language.

• (1100)

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Our intention is sincere. It is sincere and stems from our desire to strengthen both official languages and to protect French, not only outside Quebec, but also within it. The French language is declining in Quebec, especially in Montreal. I mentioned this earlier.

That is why we are going to collaborate with every party that is willing to work in the House to strengthen the French language with the Government of Quebec. It will all be done in a sincere and tangible way.

[English]

Mr. Anthony Housefather (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Labour, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this is one of the most important speeches that I have given in this virtual chamber. I want to clarify for the people in my riding and across Canada what this motion means, and even more importantly what it does not mean. I also want to contribute my views to the public record so that they can be examined by any court that may, in the future, be called upon to consider the significance of this motion.

First, I want to clarify that if this motion is adopted, it does not constitute an agreement by this House to a constitutional amendment. Amending Canada's framework document would require a proper bill, extensive public consultation, committee study and hearings, legal analysis and extensive debate in this House and across the country. I would never support any constitutional amendment that did not follow this process.

[Translation]

Second, what does this motion do?

It asks the House to recognize that section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, allows Quebec and the other provinces to unilaterally amend their respective constitutions. What the motion does not say is that section 45 is subject to section 41. Section 41 refers to section 43(b), which clearly states that any amendment to any provision that relates to the use of the English or the French language within a province also requires the approval of the House of Commons and the Senate. I will speak to what this means a little later.

This motion also calls on the House to acknowledge the fact that Quebec intends to use section 45 to amend its constitution to state that Quebecers form a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that it is also the common language of the Quebec nation.

[English]

Third, let me be clear about the mechanism being used. Quebec's proposed Bill 96 has not yet been the subject of hearings. It has not been debated, amended or adopted. Since the determination of whether section 45 applies to an amendment will depend on the final wording of Bill 96, it would be premature to offer more than a preliminary assessment as to whether section 45 could apply.

No amendment to the constitution of a province made under section 45 can have any legal effect on the Constitution of Canada. Our Constitution is very clear that if any amendment relates to the use of English or French language in the province, section 43(b) must be used, not section 45. Therefore, this amendment cannot be used to reduce or impact the rights of the Quebec English-speaking minority in any way.

It would not and could not change the scope of section 133 of the Constitution, which says that English is an equal language with French within the National Assembly and the courts of Quebec. It would not and could not change the scope of the rights of the minority language community under the charter, such as education rights under section 23. Perhaps most importantly, in my view, this amendment cannot be used to interpret whether any charter right has been breached or to justify a section 1 limitation of that right.

Fourth, I support the exact wording adopted by the House of Commons in 2006. That motion stated, "that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada." I want members to note those last words, which are "a united Canada." The current proposal is missing those words.

[Translation]

I also believe that it is very important to understand the legal implications of the notion of French as the common language of the

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Quebec nation. I hope that there will be presentations and debates in the National Assembly on this issue.

Quebec's Charter of the French Language states that French is the official language of Quebec. French is the first language used in Quebec, and French-speaking Quebecers should be able to live, work and be served in French throughout our province.

• (1105)

[English]

Some proposals in Bill 96 have raised real concerns that common language means something else. For example, is the Quebec government seeking to limit those who can receive certain services in English? Sections 22.2 and 22.3 of Bill 96 link the ability to receive certain government services in English to those who are eligible to receive instruction in English. This has never previously been done in the Charter of the French Language outside of education rights.

Let us look at what that means. Suddenly hundreds of thousands of people who considered themselves part of the English-speaking community of Quebec will no longer be eligible to receive certain services from the state in English. This would include people who came to Quebec from the United States or other English-speaking countries, and even Holocaust survivors in their nineties who have been part of the English-speaking community since arriving in Canada over 70 years ago. This is profoundly disturbing, and I very much hope this section is amended by the National Assembly.

[Translation]

There is also section 18.1, which states that the personnel members of the civil administration shall use exclusively French when communicating orally or in writing with one another in the exercise of their functions. I do not think it is reasonable to ask two anglophone public servants to speak and write to one another in French.

In light of these and other provisions in Bill 96, we can understand why leaders of the English-speaking community, including former member of Parliament Marlene Jennings, who is the president of the Quebec Community Groups Network, have expressed some serious concerns about Bill 96.

[English]

I am particularly concerned about the impact of Bill 96 on how we see the charter and how individual rights interact with collective ones. In my view, we have a Charter of Rights because we, as a society in Canada and Quebec, have accepted that there are certain rights which are inalienable, rights that are not subject to change by a simple majority in the legislature. A charter is designed to protect minorities, even unpopular minorities.

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In Bill 96, Quebec has departed entirely from this principle. First, the bill says the Charter of the French Language would no longer be subordinate to the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. This means that Quebecers would no longer be able to argue that the Charter of the French Language breaches rights under the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.

Quebec is also proposing to use a notwithstanding clause in an omnibus and pre-emptive way, preventing any Quebecer from arguing that fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, are breached under this bill. I would like to be very clear that I am against the notwithstanding clause. I do not believe it should be part of the charter.

We already have section 1, which allows legislatures to place reasonable limits on rights. To allow legislatures to allow unreasonable limits on rights, or to put laws outside the review of the judicial branch of government, is not something I can ever support. I oppose the use of the notwithstanding clause by Quebec, Ontario or any other jurisdiction.

[Translation]

Although we have to accept that the notwithstanding clause is part of the charter and can be invoked, it should be invoked only on very rare occasions, in response to a legal ruling. It must not be used pre-emptively. The idea of insulating a bill from possible legal challenges is profoundly troubling. The public would have no way to find out whether a right has been violated. As a Quebecer and a Canadian, I believe that we need an extensive public debate on this matter.

[English]

What is clear is that the issues related to our Constitution, our charter and our two official languages are at the very core of the fabric of our country. They are not documents or concepts to be taken lightly, but to be approached thoroughly, transparently and with the best interest of the federation at heart. Canadians place their trust in us to protect our country, protect our rights, including minority rights, and protect our democracy. These are not conversations that happen in one day, but rather require time, reflection and public debate. Our Constitution and Canadians deserve nothing less.

In the end, while I believe that this motion is purely symbolic in that it only asks this House to acknowledge what Quebec intends to do as opposed to the House agreeing to anything substantive, I also understand why this may be unclear to Canadians, especially official language minority communities and in particular, English-speaking Quebecers.

Therefore, I move that this motion be amended by adding, after the words “of the Quebec nation”, the following: “That the House acknowledge adopting a motion in 2006 stating that this House recognize that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada and reaffirm this position, and declare that the rights of Quebec's English-speaking minority under the Canadian Constitution may not be impacted or reduced by such an amendment.”

• (1110)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): As members know, an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion. In the absence of the sponsor, it is permissible for consent to be given or denied by the House leader, the deputy House leader, the whip or the deputy whip of the sponsor's party. Seeing as none of them is present at the moment, the amendment is not receivable at this time.

[English]

We will continue with questions and comments.

The hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Madam Speaker, the only way to get past the problem of remembering my riding name is for me to be appointed to some senior position, perhaps such as House leader. I hope my leader is listening right now.

I would like to say to my colleague, the hon. member who just spoke, that I agree with every one of the comments he made in the first part of his commentary referring to the narrow and symbolic scope of the motion. I thank him for laying things out as clearly as that, and I suspect members would find that view represents the perspective of many people in the House.

Although I have not had a chance to think it through, there is considerable merit to the amendment the member proposed to the motion. I would be interested in hearing him further explain how, in his view, we should proceed forward given the fact it is not possible to proceed with this amendment.

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, I would like to let my hon. colleague how much I respect him and his intellectual acumen.

I know there are many people throughout the country who misunderstand the symbolic nature of this motion, including my constituents and those within the English-speaking minority in Quebec and the French-speaking minorities outside of Quebec. There are certainly reasons why the House would want to restate that we are, indeed, of the belief that the Québécois should form a nation, but a nation within a united Canada, such as we agreed in 2006. I would also like to assure the English-speaking minority in Quebec that our constitutional rights will not be impacted by the motion before this House, which is the reason I proposed the amendment.

I would be happy to support the motion, provided that we clarify those two points. It is very important to my constituents and very important to many across Canada that we do so.

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[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am somewhat astounded by what my colleague is saying. I must remind him that, as far back as the 17th century, the French sailor, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, was saying that the French were different and that they formed a separate nation. On the subject of the revolt of the Patriotes in 1838, Lord Durham said, "I expected to find a conflict between a government and a people, but instead found two nations at war within the same state."

This debate has been going on for years. Listening to my colleague, I get the impression that we have gone back in time 50 years. I understand that he does not support the motion, which I would like him to confirm unequivocally. I would also like to know how a province's domestic legislation is any business of federal MPs.

• (1115)

Mr. Anthony Housefather: I am just as much a Quebecker as the member of the Bloc Québécois. I always find it frustrating that the Bloc Québécois does not recognize that I, who am an anglophone member, or my colleague from Hochelaga, who is an allophone, are just as much Quebecers as the members of the Bloc Québécois, even though we are not of French origin.

We are Quebecers. We are part of the Quebec nation within Canada. I am sorry, but I do not think that I am stuck in the past. I am actually the future of Quebec because Quebec is becoming more multicultural. We are all Quebecers within Canada.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, which was overwhelmingly in English. I understand that he wants to defend the rights of the historical English-speaking minority in Quebec and is therefore doing his job. However, given that French has been the official and common language of Quebec since 1974 under Robert Bourassa's Liberal government, what is he afraid of?

Mr. Anthony Housefather: Madam Speaker, first of all, I am troubled that my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie would question the fact that, as an English-speaking member from Quebec, I gave half of my speech in English. I was under the impression that we have two official languages in the House of Commons.

Second, I see and I fully agree that French is the official language of Quebec. I have never denied that. However, as a Liberal, I believe that we can think that way while also respecting the rights of the English-speaking minority. That is a concept I will always fight for.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Madam Speaker, as whip of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to inform the Chair that we are going to reject the amendment proposed by the member.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The amendment is not under consideration since no one in the House could respond to it for the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston.

Since the very beginning of what would become Canada, the French language has been a fundamental characteristic of our people. In 1534, when Jacques Cartier set foot on the shores of the St. Lawrence River, he did more than just discover a land unknown to Europeans, he marked the beginning of something wonderful.

As an explorer, he dreamed of achieving great things. Of course, the future held a land and a culture where amazing things would happen and where a unique people would be born. Over the years, we saw Cartier's dream develop and become the country we know today. Our history is essential. We teach it in our schools. We learn from it as part of our work, and our culture allows us to remember it.

Although things can change or evolve over time, one thing has stayed constant. One of the elements found in all the years of our country's history is the French language. It has been a driving force for our people and a source of pride. It continues to be an integral part of the identity of Canadians and Quebecers.

The Conservative Party of Canada understands this. We also understand the unique character of Quebec beyond the French language. A Conservative government will always respect provincial jurisdiction, including the ability of any province to unilaterally amend the section of the Constitution that deals exclusively with its own internal governance. Both the British North America Act and section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, allow the provinces to do this.

Most of them have already used this power. Quebec, Manitoba and the Atlantic provinces abolished their provincial upper houses between 1876 and 1968. Alberta and British Columbia abolished multi-member ridings. Alberta amended its constitution in 1990 to guarantee its Métis communities land title and other rights.

The province of Newfoundland used its powers to change its name to Newfoundland and Labrador in 2001. Given all these examples, it would be discriminatory to prohibit Quebec from using these same laws to do what is best for its people. As a province and as a people, we stand out in Canada and in the world, and our party has always supported this.

Provincial autonomy is important and is something that the Conservatives, unlike our Liberal colleagues, deeply respect. Members will recall that, in 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper fought to give Quebec a seat at UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. This important step was a proud moment for the province. Its natural beauty, rich history and wonderful culture are international jewels and deserve to be recognized.

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Quebec is one of the many things that make Canada so unique. Internationally, Quebec makes a valuable contribution to the arts, science, technology and culture. Our solid industries, talented artists and creative students have made their way to many parts of the world. This deserved to be celebrated in 2006, as it does today. That is a good example of the Conservative Party's determination to promote Quebec globally, its pride in la belle province and its commitment to provincial autonomy.

Prime Minister Harper, in particular, defended Quebec and ensured that we were not forgotten. His motion for recognition of the Quebec nation by the federal government was a major step forward. Mr. Harper and the entire Conservative Party wanted the House to recognize that "the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada".

● (1120)

That second example makes me think of our founding fathers, who shared that same vision. Thanks to the efforts of Macdonald and Cartier in the second half of the 19th century, we became a unique and magnificent country unlike any other the world over. Their work laid the foundation for our political system and ensured that the French language maintained its important status in our society when Upper Canada and Lower Canada united. Cartier himself played a pivotal role in the formation of the Great Coalition, which was one of the first steps along the path to Confederation. His presence in London, Charlottetown and Quebec City was of crucial importance, and it was largely because of him that Quebec became part of the Dominion of Canada.

Our Confederation and our provincial structure function harmoniously and in unison when the government does not overstep its bounds and respects the provinces' authority and responsibilities. That applies just as much to Quebec as it does to Alberta, Ontario and every other province and territory in our great country.

While that authority applies for all provinces, I believe it is important to single out Quebec's unique history. That deserves our special attention because French Canadians are a minority in Canada and in North America. As a proud and confident people, we have too often felt forgotten. It is time to take action and get on top of things. When we want something, we have to go get it. Nobody is going to serve up what we want on a silver platter. We have to speak up about what we want and fight to get it.

One of the Conservative Party's fundamental beliefs is that the people of this country are capable of working hard to get what they want, and I see that value reflected in today's political system. Quebec knows what it has to do to get what it wants, and that is exactly what is happening.

Even today, provincial autonomy and jurisdictions are not fully respected. When it comes to health transfers to the provinces, the Prime Minister made some promises with exceptions attached and agreed to some requests, but again only with conditions attached. The Prime Minister has never been a partner to the provinces, and he keeps interfering in provincial jurisdictions by making promises with strings attached. Federal centralization is an ongoing phenomenon that leads to complications with the provinces. It is time to stop this back and forth and properly recognize the authority of the provinces.

This is not a new issue. Quebec has always had to fight for its language, from the time French and English settlers fought hundreds of years ago until the implementation of laws like Bill 101 in Quebec. The Quebec Act, the Official Languages Act and many others were battles fought at the expense of the French language.

The 2016 census found that nearly 80% of Quebecers speak French as their mother tongue. That is more than six million people. Despite this huge number of French Canadians, the Liberal government continues to neglect Quebec. The Liberals have had since 2015 to overhaul official languages, but they have not done so. The government needs a better understanding of the importance of provincial jurisdiction and the Quebec nation.

Today's motion has my support and the support of our party. Under section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, Quebec and the provinces should have exclusive jurisdiction to amend their respective constitutions. It is not that Quebec wants to enshrine its nationhood in its constitution, it is that Quebec needs to preserve our heritage and our nation in a meaningful way.

Although we recognize the presence of anglophone minority groups in Quebec, the common language of the Quebec nation is French, and it should be the only official language of our province. In other words, our house is built on a French foundation. We must ensure that the foundation remains solid, and we must upgrade the structure over time to ensure its integrity.

● (1125)

Our history is rich and complex and goes beyond language laws, but it guides our identity and shapes our culture.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. He provided a very interesting historical perspective. We also agree on the three points raised in this motion about the Constitution and recognizing the Quebec nation and French as its official language.

However, we have a concern about recognizing French as the common language, and I wonder if he shares that concern.

In his view, would this not hinder the recognition by the National Assembly of Quebec of the indigenous languages present in Quebec?

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Speaker, our leader recognizes the importance of French. He is prepared to apply bill 101 to federally regulated businesses. He also recognizes that the Official Languages Act needs to be modernized, and respecting jurisdictions is part of his values.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, the member did give us a nice history lesson.

Today we are talking about the French language and about Quebec and francophone culture, and we are also in the midst of a rather heated debate on Bill C-10, an important part of which is designed to protect francophone culture. However, there is a lot of opposition to this bill in my colleague's party.

I would like to hear my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord speak to how important it is to protect francophone culture through laws, such as the Broadcasting Act, which we are in the process of reviewing.

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Speaker, protecting culture is, of course, very important to us. However, we will not compromise on freedom of expression, because that is extremely important to us.

• (1130)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

We are talking about the use of French and about defending the French fact here, in federal institutions, so I would like to hear the member's thoughts on something that the NDP has been calling for for several years. The Conservative Party's position is not clear.

Would the Conservative Party make it mandatory for justices of the Supreme Court of Canada to be bilingual?

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Speaker, the important thing is that the Conservative Party recognizes provincial jurisdiction. That is of the utmost importance to us. Quebec has the right to make its own decisions.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be able to ask my question again, because I did not get an answer at all. I heard the hon. member talk about the importance that his party seems to place on the myth that Bill C-10 would infringe on freedom of expression, but that was not the point of my question at all. I wanted his opinion on the importance that should be placed on protecting francophone and Quebec culture in the legislation that is voted on here in the House of Commons, and particularly on the urgent need to pass a bill, such as Bill C-10 on broadcasting, in which specific regulations and a specific framework would be enshrined to protect francophone culture.

That is really what I want to hear from the hon. member, not rhetoric about freedom of expression. We have already heard a lot of that.

Mr. Richard Martel: Madam Speaker, we do need to protect our culture, but right now, freedom of expression is what is at stake, and our party will not compromise on that.

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, my question is with respect to the motion from 2006 recognizing Quebec as a nation inside a unified Canada. Does the member support that motion?

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel: The answer is yes, Madam Speaker.

[English]

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Madam Speaker, practice makes perfect.

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[Translation]

The motion that is before us today has two parts. The first part says this, and I quote:

That the House agree that section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, grants Quebec and the provinces exclusive jurisdiction to amend their respective constitutions...

The second part says, and I quote:

[That the House] acknowledge the will of Quebec to enshrine in its constitution that Quebecers form a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that it is also the common language of the Quebec nation.

[English]

One cannot vote for or against one part of the motion without doing the same for the other part. However, I have very little to say about part two, which asks us to take note of two expressions of what is called the will of Quebec and also to take note of the obviously true fact that French is the common language of the Québécois, which it has been since 1608.

We all deeply and sincerely hope that this foundational fact that French is the *lingua franca* of the Québécois will continue to be the case for the next 400 years, just as it has been for the past 400 years.

[Translation]

For me, a Quebec nation in which French is not the *lingua franca* is unthinkable.

[English]

Likewise, it is a fact already acknowledged by the House that the Québécois are a nation. Fifteen years ago, the Commons voted for that by a margin of 265 to 16.

[Translation]

That this House recognize that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada.

[English]

The words “*au sein d'un Canada uni*” are absent from today's motion, as one would expect from a motion produced by the Bloc Québécois. Nonetheless, it is true that the motion, as it is worded, is by no means incompatible with a united Canada. It is quite the opposite.

Beyond this, I am not sure there is much to say about the second half of the motion. My interest, as a student of the Constitution, is in responding to the first assertion of the motion, which says, in its English version, “That the House agree that section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, grants Quebec and the provinces exclusive jurisdiction to amend their respective constitutions.”

My comments on this subject are primarily intended to sway the views of my anglophone colleagues, and therefore I will be speaking only English as I address this subject.

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The wording of section 45 is, "Subject to section 41, the legislature of each province may exclusively make laws amending the constitution of the province."

Members will notice the internal reference to another part of the Constitution, section 41. This reference is necessary because unlike the constitutions of other federations, like Switzerland or Australia, Canada's Constitution contains multiple amending formula instead of just one. That is to say that different parts of the same Constitution can only be amended using different combinations of legislative instruments from different legislative bodies.

For example, there are some parts of the Constitution that may only be amended if identical resolutions are passed in Parliament and in all 10 provincial legislatures. This amending formula is contained in section 41 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and of course, section 41 is the clause specifically referenced in section 45. I will not mention section 41 except to observe that it was referenced in section 45 to prevent provinces from unilaterally altering the powers of their lieutenant governors.

Other parts of the Constitution, including the Charter of Rights, can be amended only by means of identical resolutions in Parliament and in the legislatures of the seven provinces containing at least 50% of Canada's population. This is colloquially known as the 7/50 amending formula, and it is described in section 38 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

On the other hand, to enact an amendment to the charter designed to place further restrictions on the powers of only a single province, another formula that is found in section 43 of the Constitution Act, 1982, applies. Identical resolutions must be adopted by the legislature of that province alone and by Parliament. It was the use of the section 43 amending formula that in 1993 made it possible to add a new linguistic right to the charter that applied to New Brunswick alone, which was section 16.1 of the charter.

• (1135)

Likewise, section 43 is also the only formula that may be used for either of the two following matters. It states:

- (a) any alterations to boundaries between provinces; and
- (b) any amendment to any provision that relates to the use of the English or the French language within a province,

The existence of multiple amending formulae for the Constitution of Canada is not new. Section 92(1) of the Constitution Act, 1867 was the predecessor to section 45. It was in force for over a century.

Section 92(1) stated:

...in each province the legislature may exclusively make laws in relation to the amendment from time to time of the Constitution of the province, except as regards the office of Lieutenant-Governor.

The ability of Quebec or of any other province to amend its own Constitution is uncontroversial. The more challenging question is what constitutes a provincial constitution.

In other federations like Switzerland, Australia or the United States, this question would never arise. Each Swiss canton and each American state has its own stand-alone constitution. The constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, for example, is the

oldest written constitution in the world, dating back to 1780, which makes it a decade older than the constitution of the United States.

In Canada, such tidy, clearly defined provincial constitutions do not exist. In this province, provincial constitutions can take one of three forms, which leads to some surface confusion.

In the three provinces that were created by federal statute, the relevant federal statute is the constitution of the province: the Manitoba Act, the Saskatchewan Act and the Alberta Act, respectively. Despite being acts of the Parliament of Canada, these statutes can, under authority of section 45, be amended only by the provincial legislature. Parliament is constitutionally precluded from being involved.

In the five provinces that existed before Confederation, the pre-existing British statutes under which they had been created are their constitutions. Despite being acts of the Parliament at Westminster, these too can be amended unilaterally by the province under authority of section 45. Again, there is no permitted role for Parliament.

That leaves Quebec and Ontario. Their constitutional situation is summed up by eminent constitutional scholar Professor Peter Hogg in the following words:

The Constitution Act, 1867, which, it will be recalled, created Ontario and Quebec out of the old united province of Canada, contains a set of provisions (ss. 69 to 87) which are essentially the constitutions of those two provinces.

Therefore, sections 69 to 87 are the provisions which could potentially be subject to amendment, using the section 45 amending formula, which is to say that they could be potentially subject to amendment by means of an act of Quebec's national assembly or Ontario's legislature.

It is Professor Hogg's view, and my own as well, that Parliament, once again, is not permitted to play a role in such amendments.

This leaves the question of whether amendments can be made to the Constitution of Quebec or Ontario that involve making any amendment to the Constitution Act, 1867, in which the subject matter falls outside subjects covered in sections 69 to 87, which are sections that deal solely with the functioning of the two provincial legislatures.

In particular, could changes be made such as those proposed in Quebec's Bill 96, which seeks to add two new sections immediately following section 90 of the Constitution Act, 1867? I have several tentative answers to this question.

First, the fact section 90 falls outside of the section 69 to 87 envelope is irrelevant.

Second, this is a matter that is outside the remit of Parliament. We are not decision-makers on this. The courts ultimately will have to decide whether sections 158 of Bill 96, which is the part of the bill in which these two amendments are proposed, is *intra vires* or *ultra vires* the section 45 amending formula. We MPs can weigh in on this subject but our views are not binding on anybody.

Third, and this is the last point I will make, and most important, although the motion we are debating today deals with the same subjects as the two contemplated additions to the Constitution Act, 1867 contained in Bill 96, we have not been asked to vote for or against Bill 96. We have been asked to vote on a specific question regarding the section 45 amending formula and a specific statement about what the motion refers to as the will or *volonté* of the Québécois, as expressed by the national assembly.

On these questions, it seems to me the answer is yes—

• (1140)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The member's time is up. I left a bit of time, but maybe he will be able to finish during questions and comments.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to commend my colleague who has a really nice French accent.

He supports the Quebec nation but would like to add something to the Bloc Québécois motion to indicate that the Quebec nation is located within a united Canada.

First, I would like him to define what a “united Canada” means to him.

Second, would it not be better to see that Quebecers, colleagues and partners are happy in his Canada?

[English]

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, I will start by finishing the last sentence of my speech, which was the only sentence I did not manage to get in. On these questions, it seems to me the answer is yes and therefore that is how I will be voting.

[Translation]

To answer my colleague's question, it is not up to us as members from ridings outside Quebec to determine what measures are required to make Quebecers happy and to make them equal partners in Canada. We need to respond to Quebecers' initiatives. Today's motion is an example of that.

My colleague asked another question, but honestly, I cannot remember what his first question was.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I sit with my colleague on the international human rights subcommittee and I know he is a very intelligent and thoughtful member of the House. I also know that his riding has a large population of francophones outside of Quebec as does mine of Edmonton Strathcona. I am going to ask him a question about protections for francophones outside of Quebec.

As the member will know, section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees French language and that guarantee is at risk in Edmonton Strathcona because of the potential closure quite soon of Campus Saint-Jean.

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Does he feel the federal government has work to do, and could be doing more and doing it more urgently, to protect French language across Canada by ensuring that campuses like Campus Saint-Jean are protected.

• (1145)

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, I actually do not have a large population of francophones in my riding. It is a perpetual problem trying to keep up my French because I do not get the chance to speak it daily. Lately, I have taken to listening only to music with French lyrics as a way of helping myself not lose too much, which is a very enjoyable way of maintaining one's language.

With regard to maintaining academic institutions in other provinces that assist the francophone minorities in those provinces and also those who want to learn and educate themselves in French, who are not necessarily francophones themselves, there can be a role for the federal government in funding them. Ultimately, we also need to ensure, as members of the relevant communities, that we put the right kind of pressure on university administrations to assign funds appropriately. This is not an issue only in Edmonton, but also in places like Sudbury, for example, and some spots east of Quebec as well in the Atlantic.

Mr. Scott Davidson (York—Simcoe, CPC): Madam Speaker, I noticed the member had a number of notes and I wonder if there is anything else he wants to expand upon today.

Mr. Scott Reid: Madam Speaker, I always write very long speeches, which could not possibly be given in the time allowed. My self-editing cut out a considerable amount of material.

With regard to the issue of dealing with this within the framework of the Constitution. If we look at Canada's constitutional history, some of the leading figures, some of the most distinguished and thoughtful figures, were francophone Lower Canadians. The term “Québécois” did not exist at the time. People like George-Étienne Cartier and Étienne-Paschal Taché believed profoundly in the importance of establishing a Constitution that had detailed divisions of power and then rigorously followed the idea that the provinces would be independent, like independent states, which is where the term “state” comes from in the United States, in their areas of jurisdiction and the federal government would be completely independent in its area of jurisdiction. I suggest that model of federalism is the only one that will work in Canada and we should all embrace it.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will share my time with my colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby.

I am pleased to take part in the debate on this extremely interesting motion as the work of the House draws to a close.

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The motion before us is quite interesting because it articulates certain facts that are well established, some of them for quite some time. This motion is therefore both political and symbolic, but it is not binding in any way. If this motion is adopted, not much will change for Quebecers even though the notions and concepts within have gained broad consensus. It has been clear since this morning that there is consensus in the House.

I do not think there is unanimous support for the motion, and there may be some nuances and concerns. There is one thing in particular that we are concerned about, and I will get back to that. Nevertheless, I think there is broad consensus around the motion's three main points.

The motion contains three elements: the Constitution, the nation and the French language.

With respect to the Constitution, the Government of Quebec has tabled Bill 96, which proposes to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, to insert Quebec's fundamental characteristics, including the fact that Quebecers form a nation and that French is the only official language of Quebec and thus constitutes the common language of the Quebec nation.

Specifically, these amendments would be inserted after section 90 of the Constitution Act, 1867. This proposal would allow Quebec to amend its own constitution. It could therefore amend the Quebec section of Canadian Constitution. In fact, section 45 of the Canadian Constitution provides for that; it says, and I quote:

45 Subject to section 41, the legislature of each province may exclusively make laws amending the constitution of the province.

This is also the consensus among certain experts. I will quote Benoît Pelletier, a former Quebec cabinet member who is now a law professor at the University of Ottawa. Recently, he was seriously ill with COVID-19 and I wish him a speedy recovery and good health.

He said, "If you ask me, what the Quebec government is proposing falls under section 45, which is why I said it is constitutional and legal."

The first point in the motion proposes a constitutional change, which is really quite innovative. This has never been done before and would have an impact on legal interpretation. That impact would not be all-encompassing, but would be certain. Quebec has the prerogative to do this.

The motion proposes to amend the Quebec section of the Constitution to state that Quebec is a nation and that French is its official language. This is part of what New Democrats have long proposed as a progressive force and corresponds to our values. This vision and direction is entirely consistent with the Sherbrooke declaration adopted by the NDP in 2005. I will quote from it, because it is directly relevant to the discussion we are having today.

The Sherbrooke declaration is clear on this matter. It states:

The New Democratic Party recognizes the national character of Québec and believes that that character can be expressed in the context of the Canadian federation.

The national character of Québec is based primarily, but not exclusively, on:

- i. a primarily francophone society in which French is recognized as the language of work and the common public language.

That is extremely important. It confirms that culturally, historically, sociologically and politically, Quebec is not a province like the others. It is a nation within the federation.

That is why the NDP advocates something called asymmetrical federalism, which allows Quebec to opt out of new federal programs with financial compensation. It is offered to Quebec based on this recognition of its nationhood.

The nation was recognized more broadly by this Parliament in 2006. Once again, we are not reinventing the wheel. That said, I am very proud that we can recognize a modern, diverse, positive and inclusive Quebec nation that is open to the world. This nation makes room for newcomers, who enrich our shared culture and living space, and for influences from around the world.

● (1150)

In this regard, I would like to take this opportunity to talk about one of the successes of the Charter of the French Language. The third point that I wish to address, after the Constitution and the nation, is the French language.

I would remind the House that French has been the official language since 1974, when the Liberal government of Robert Bourassa passed Bill 22, or "le gros bill", as Yvon Deschamps would say. This legislation made French the official language in a number of areas. That is when French became the language of legislation and the courts, of public administration, of public utility companies and professional orders, as well as the language of business, work and education, with some exceptions and exclusions. Bill 22 lasted about three years before it was replaced by the Charter of the French Language, also known as Bill 101.

In a Quebec that is open to the world, that welcomes people who want to come here and contribute to the development of our society and our world, one of the great successes of the Charter of the French Language and Bill 101 is, in my opinion, compulsory education in French for the children of immigrants.

I have been a member for a Montreal riding for a few years now. I have lived in Montreal for over 25 years. It is always extremely touching to see boys and girls, from all over the world, speaking to each other in French, playing in French in the schoolyard and having fun in French after school. It is a great achievement of the Quebec government and the Charter of the French Language to have been able to ensure this renewal through the newcomers who join our society and our nation.

I know many people very well who are children of Bill 101. They are people who work for the NDP, but there is also someone with whom I share my life, who works in French and for whom French is the third language. There is a history within the NDP of wanting to strengthen the French position, not only in Quebec, but also in Canada, where the French language is in an extreme minority situation. As has been pointed out several times today, francophones account for about 2% to 3% of North America's population. Not only are francophones a barely represented demographic, but they are also subjected to the cultural influence of the American giant and its cultural imperialism, which overflows its borders and has spread around the world. It is extremely important to remain very vigilant.

In 2013, we accomplished something great when our former member Alexandrine Latendresse succeeded in passing a bill requiring all officers of Parliament, like the Auditor General, to be bilingual. It was a step forward, something important that we wished to have. We have always fought for the right of Quebecers to work in French and communicate with their employers in French. These are principles of the Charter of the French Language, that is to say the possibility for these workers, who account for about 10% of Quebec's workforce, to have the same rights as those who work for federally regulated businesses.

It is a matter of defending French, as well as a matter of equal rights for workers. We are in an absurd situation right now where a person who works at the credit union has certain language rights that someone who works at a Royal Bank or a Bank of Montreal does not. We need to fix this problem.

Recently, in 2020, I tabled a motion that received unanimous consent in the House. It aimed to recognize the decline of French, as well as the need for a plan to stop the decline and protect French across Canada.

On this third point, I would like to conclude by saying that we do not want this motion to have an adverse effect on the recognition of indigenous languages in Quebec. The National Assembly and the Quebec government have recognized the status of indigenous languages in Quebec for years. One does not preclude the other. Recognizing that French is the common and official language of Quebec should never adversely affect our recognition of indigenous languages and the fact that we want to make sure that they continue to exist and develop in Quebec.

• (1155)

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie and thank him for his speech.

I have two questions for him, and I have no doubt that I will get a clear answer this time.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks about the fact that the government chose to table a bill meeting many of the requests made by the National Assembly today, on an opposition day when the Bloc Québécois tables a motion to recognize and strengthen French as the only official language of Quebec.

My second question for my colleague concerns our motion today. Does he think that the amendment to the amendment proposed ear-

lier, which was not adopted by the House for reasons we are well aware of, would completely change the meaning of the motion tabled by the Bloc Québécois?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, in my opinion, it is very cynical on the part of the Liberal government to use an opposition day of one of the opposition parties that wishes to discuss the French fact to table a bill aimed at modernizing the Official Languages Act at the last minute.

In my opinion, they are making political hay. The idea is to get on the right side of the debate. It is even more cynical, since the bill will not be debated or adopted by the House, whether or not we go to the polls in the fall. It is simply a public relations ploy. I find that unfortunate, because we deserve better than that.

With respect to the amendment, it contradicts the very essence of the motion as it was introduced. It should be deemed procedurally out of order on its face.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I know that my colleague is a staunch defender of Quebec and French language rights in Quebec and across the country. I had the great pleasure of welcoming him to Edmonton Strathcona just a couple of weeks ago. He came and met with members of the francophone community in Edmonton, virtually of course.

In addition to what he brought up in his speech, what other ways can he envision protecting language rights for Canadians across the country? What other things would he propose we do to make sure that language rights are protected?

• (1200)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. I would also like to thank her for inviting me to meet with representatives of a few Franco-Albertan associations. The meetings were very interesting and enlightening.

I am on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Right now, we are conducting a study on post-secondary education at certain universities, including Campus Saint-Jean and Université de Moncton. We are also looking at the situation with Laurentian and the initiative involving the University of Sudbury. The federal government needs to do a lot more.

All of the presidents, rectors and associations that testified before the Standing Committee on Official Languages told us there should be a commitment and stable, regular funding for post-secondary education in French across Canada. Not only is this something that the federal government can and should do, it is actually a constitutional obligation.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

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I would like to highlight one element of his speech that I thought was very apt concerning Quebec's Charter of the French Language. Using French as the language of instruction has helped immensely in integrating newcomers into the French-speaking community, as well as in creating a welcoming place with a common language.

The question I would like to ask my colleague concerns language of work. One day, we will get to grips with the convolutions of the modernized act, which is a political stunt that the federal government is pulling with regard to the French language.

Concerning language of work, would the best solution not be to apply Bill 101, as federally regulated businesses in Quebec are calling for?

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

We both worked in the union movement. Using French at work was always very important to the organization I worked for. There were francization committees in institutions and companies. The union also had francization programs and plans. It is extremely important to protect and maintain the French language in the workplace.

Where the federal government can really take action is the 10% of companies under federal jurisdiction. The Quebec government has implemented certain initiatives. It has done some very good work, and I hope it will continue. What we at the federal level need to do is guarantee the right of workers to work and interact in French.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be speaking right after my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, not only because his speech was extraordinarily profound and important, but also because he is one of the greatest defenders of minority language rights in the House and, of course, the defender of French in Quebec. His words and his actions are proof of that. He understands that we always need to strengthen the French language, not only in Quebec, but across the country. I have an enormous amount of respect and esteem for him.

As the hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie just mentioned, today's motion is important, but it merely reiterates things that were already settled in the past. The fact that Quebecers form a nation was of course recognized and reinforced by a motion in the House of Commons in 2006. The fact that French is the only official language of Quebec has been recognized since 1974, and the fact that French is the common language of the Quebec nation has been recognized for a long time as well. These facts are constantly being reinforced.

There are some concerns about the decline of French. Certain measures are providing hope, which is important, and my party, the NDP, has always been the only one that defends French and wants to strengthen it both in Quebec and across Canada.

Our record makes that clear. As my colleagues know, the NDP was the first party to talk about enacting an official languages act. It was also the first party to proclaim Quebec's right to self-determination, and the first party to advance the rights of linguistic minorities outside Quebec.

I will get back to this a bit later, but it was an NDP provincial government that set up the French-language school systems in British Columbia and Saskatchewan. Once again, in Manitoba, it was an NDP government that enacted the Official Language Act. In Ontario, it was an NDP government that created the college system.

I want to remind the House of our history and the work of NDP members like Léo Piquette in Alberta, Elizabeth Weir in New Brunswick and Alexa McDonough in Nova Scotia. In every respect, the NDP has always understood the importance of French at both the provincial and federal levels. As my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie so eloquently put it, ever since Jack Layton and the NDP adopted the Sherbrooke declaration, we have always borne in mind the need to respect the Quebec nation and to ensure that every federal program allows Quebecers to opt out with full compensation.

I would also like to talk a bit about the trips I have taken to francophone regions over the course of my life. As my colleagues know, at 24, I decided to learn French, so I moved to Chicoutimi. Even in Chicoutimi at the time, as a young anglophone who spoke only a few words of French, I received services in English at the Jonquière office of the Société d'assurance automobile du Québec when I went to exchange my British Columbia driver's licence for a Quebec one.

In addition to my time in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean, I also lived in the Eastern Townships east of Montreal, where I worked for several years at Champlain College and Bishop's University, two entirely English-language institutions in a beautiful region of Quebec where English-language institutions are still alive and well. I also lived in Montreal and in the Outaouais, and in all these places I found well-funded and very pleasant English-language institutions. Whether we are talking about hospitals or schools, the network is there.

● (1205)

What is important is to maintain these institutions, but we must especially make sure that French is protected and that it can develop throughout Quebec. This is an important aspect of what the NDP has always supported. Where I differ from my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois, is about the need to talk about the importance of French outside Quebec.

I worked in northern New Brunswick and in Acadian territory, and I can say that the French language and French-language institutions are extremely strong there. That is important for the francophonie across Canada. Having also worked and lived in eastern Ontario, and as a francophile from British Columbia, I understand the importance of these French-language institutions, as well as of the federal government that finances and supports them across the country. This has not been the case in recent years, under either the Conservatives or the Liberals. The underfunding of French-language institutions puts the very strength and prosperity of francophone communities at risk.

In British Columbia, where I now live, the number of francophones is on the rise. Several factors contribute to this increase. One of the important elements is the fact that, in British Columbia, there are francophiles, people like me, especially young people, who are learning French as a key asset for supporting the francophonie in British Columbia.

I am now one of 300,000 French speakers in British Columbia. This is an important point that is not often considered by my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois. The fact that there are 300,000 of us and that the number keeps rising reinforces the cultural aspect and the importance of the cultural economy of French in Canada. When Quebec or Acadian artists come to Vancouver, they perform before packed houses. The vitality of the francophone community is apparent everywhere in British Columbia. It is apparent in the increase not only in the number of francophones, but in the number of francophiles as well. Francophiles are often the ones packing the house. Right now, with COVID-19, there are few performances, but we hope to see that change soon.

The fact that francophiles contribute to this major increase in the popularity of French in British Columbia has a lot to do with the fact that parents stand in line for an entire weekend to register their children for French immersion. There are a number of French schools for people whose first language is French, but there is also a system of French immersion schools. As a result, there are more and more consumers of Quebec, Acadian and Franco-Ontarian cultural products. This contributes to the growth of French on a national scale.

It is very clear that French must be strengthened in Quebec. I do not deny that, and the NDP fully supports that idea and the measures that come with it, but it is also important to have a federal government that strengthens the presence of francophone institutions across the country. This is the best way to strengthen French across Canada and truly build a future where the French language can thrive across the country.

• (1210)

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is true that today's motion does not really have any legal weight, but we must not lump it together with Bill 96. We are hearing a lot today about how the amendments proposed by the Bloc Québécois are symbolic. I totally disagree, because they clearly have a binding aspect. I am certain that any constitutional provision can be binding.

What does my colleague have to say about that?

Does he believe that the motion introduced by the Bloc Québécois is binding?

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, it reinforces important aspects of things that have already been reiterated in the House of Commons in 2006 and in the Quebec National Assembly in 1974. It is important to raise these points, and I see that these are things that everyone could support.

I will reiterate the important comment made by my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, which is that it is important to make it clear that we also want to see indigenous languages thrive in Quebec and throughout Canada. This is an important aspect that

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must be reiterated, and I am pleased that the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Order.

The hon. member for West Nova.

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a simple question.

When it comes to Canada's francophonie, Quebec is seen as the brightest light in the country. The member mentioned the Acadians, who are part of Canada's francophonie.

Can he tell us how Quebec can work with the provinces to promote small francophone communities in the rest of Canada, like mine, where the common language is French?

• (1215)

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

Of course Nova Scotia has an extremely prosperous Acadian community. It has networks of co-operatives and credit unions. It is very exciting to see the renewed prosperity of the Acadian community in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. It is encouraging.

Now, the federal government has a role to play in funding francophone institutions. The problem is that for several years, this area has been neglected by both the current Liberal government and the former Conservative government.

The NDP supports the development of francophone communities across the country. Naturally, if an NDP government is elected in the coming months, that is what we will work on. It is vital to our collective future.

[English]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague from New Westminster—Burnaby briefly mentioned indigenous languages in his remarks. I wonder if he could expand on that with respect to my riding of South Okanagan—West Kootenay and the indigenous language of Nsyilxc'n. Only perhaps 100 or 200 people are left in the world who speak that language. Indigenous languages need protection and support to thrive after years of residential school and the brutal suppression of these languages.

Mr. Peter Julian: Madam Speaker, my colleague from South Okanagan—West Kootenay always asks very pertinent, relevant questions in the House.

This has been a national tragedy. Combined with what we have learned and continue to learn about the genocide over the past few weeks, this is a question of emergency. Many indigenous languages have already perished. We see young indigenous activists attempting by every means possible to revive those languages. They need substantial supports from the federal government. The federal government loves to support banks and billionaires. The government needs to put a priority on supporting indigenous languages in peril and those that are still strong and need additional reinforcements.

*Speaker's Ruling***POINTS OF ORDER**

ADMISSIBILITY OF AMENDMENTS IN THE FIFTH REPORT OF THE
STANDING COMMITTEE ON CANADIAN HERITAGE —SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I would like to thank the member for Banff—Airdrie for his point of order raised yesterday regarding admissibility of amendments made to clauses 8 to 47 of Bill C-10, An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, by the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, and contained in its fifth report.

The member argued that by putting the question on amendments after the expiry of the time provided for in the time allocation order of the House, the committee went beyond the provisions of the order. Accordingly, he asked the Chair to strike out from the report the amendments adopted to clauses 8 to 47 of the bill. In addition, he asked the Chair to rule out of order the amendment introducing new clause 13.1 because it was outside the scope of the bill.

Several principles come into play when considering the first issue of this point of order.

[Translation]

Time allocation allows for specific periods of time to be fixed for the consideration of one or more stages of a public bill. Its main effect is to determine a set amount of time for debate.

As was recently pointed out, we have few examples of time allocation motions applied to committee consideration of bills. Until last week, we had no example of such a motion being adopted since February 2001, when the House made important Standing Order modifications in regard to committee consideration of bills and the selection of report stage motions. There are few precedents involving the imposition of such an order on a committee.

• (1220)

[English]

The Chair is generally reluctant to involve itself in committee matters unless something extraordinary has occurred. This reluctance is even greater when the committee has not provided any insight through a substantive report to the House. While it is also generally understood that committees are masters of their own proceedings, this principle is not unlimited.

We know for instance that the Speaker may be asked to intervene when committees exceed their mandate when considering legislation. This is usually with respect to the procedural admissibility of amendments.

The member for Banff—Airdrie referred to page 779 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, in his intervention. Were the principle and scope of the bill respected? Was an amendment infringing on the royal recommendation, or was it relevant? These are matters of interest for the Chair.

[Translation]

On June 7, the House adopted a time allocation motion concerning Bill C-10 so that no more than five additional hours of debate be allotted to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. At the expiry of the limit, after which the proceedings were to be interrupted, and I quote, “every question necessary for the disposal of

the said stage of the bill shall be put forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment.”

There is no question that the House, by adopting a time allocation motion, has decided to limit the study of the bill in committee. The committee continued its study of the bill, and committee members debated and proposed amendments until the end of the time allocated.

[English]

When the committee reached the five-hour mark, it had to interpret the House order and reconcile it with the decisions previously taken in regard to the amendments put forward by both independent members and committee members, as well as context surrounding its consideration of the bill.

The House order is silent about the amendments submitted by independent members deemed moved in the committee and about amendments for which committee members had given notice and that had already been distributed to members but not yet proposed.

Ultimately, the committee decided that all amendments received prior to its five-hour deadline would be put to a vote, but that no further amendments or subamendments would be considered.

[Translation]

It is clear that the committee considers all the clauses of the bill and that amendments submitted by representatives of all the recognized parties, as well as by a member belonging to a party that is not recognized, were proposed for the vast majority of them after the five-hour deadline had passed. The Chair is not empowered to pronounce itself on the circumstances surrounding the study of these amendments, it can simply note the result.

As mentioned earlier, the precedents in regard to the interpretation by a committee of a time allocation motion are very few. That said, in the view of the Chair, the terms of the House order were clear and stated that, at the expiry of the five hours, no further debate ought to take place nor amendments moved or adopted.

• (1225)

[English]

I therefore rule that the committee exceeded its authority by putting the question on amendments after the five-hour mark. However, in the list of amendments made to clauses 8 to 47, the Chair notes that the amendment made to clause 23, which added text to line 7 on page 20 and replaced line 8 on page 24 of the bill with new text, was the consequential result of an amendment previously adopted by the committee to clause 7 of the bill. Accordingly, this amendment will stand.

All other amendments made to clauses 8 to 47 are declared null and void, and will no longer form part of the bill as reported to the House. In addition, I am ordering that a reprint of the bill be published with all possible haste for use by the House at report stage to replace the reprint ordered by the committee.

Finally, with respect to the amendment that created new clause 13.1, I would agree with the member that this modifies a section of the Broadcasting Act that was not covered by Bill C-10. As such, it is a violation of the “parent Act” rule and it goes beyond the scope of the bill. Consequently, it is also declared null and void and will not form part of the bill. Report stage, the next step in the legislative process for this bill, will accord an opportunity for amendments to the bill to be made.

I thank the House for its attention.

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—AMENDMENT TO SECTION 45 OF THE CONSTITUTION AND QUEBEC, A FRENCH-SPEAKING NATION

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to start by marking the 30th anniversary of my wonderful political family, the Bloc Québécois. Officially born at a founding convention on June 15, 1991, the Bloc Québécois has been the only federal political party dedicated solely to defending the values and interests of Quebecers for the past three decades.

I would also like to point out that the first member elected following the creation of my riding of Laurentides—Labelle in 2003 was Bloc Québécois MP Johanne Deschamps, who served three terms between 2004 and 2011. It was in fact from Ms. Deschamps that I got to learn the trade. I worked as her political aide from 2009 to 2011. I have learned a lot over the past few months, and I am still learning. It was a privilege to have this experience.

The women and men who make up the great Bloc Québécois family have been working for 30 years. I just want to take a minute to show just how proud we can be of our achievements.

The Bloc Québécois is working for Quebec culture. For example, there is Bill C-10, so ably defended by the member for Drummond.

We are working for agriculture, particularly through my esteemed colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé's sustained defence of supply management.

We are striving to protect the environment by frequently speaking in favour of climate accountability and ending federal subsidies for fossil fuels. This cause is being championed by the all-female duo of the members for Repentigny and Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

We are working for Quebec's economy by presenting demands and applying pressure to obtain a real federal aerospace policy, support the development of Quebec's forestry industry and defend our Quebec businesses. My colleagues from Joliette, Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot and Jonquière are doing remarkable work on these issues.

We are working for border security by calling for oversight of border management. I am thinking of our member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia among others.

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Of course, we are working for the sound management of government business by holding the government's feet to the fire on issues that represent a conflict of interest, whether it is the partisan appointment of judges or the awarding of contracts to Liberal friends. I salute the hard work of my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord. I have been working alongside him for the past 14 months.

I would like to highlight the Bloc Québécois's efforts to improve employment insurance by proudly proposing to increase the number of weeks of sickness benefits. I salute my colleague from Salaberry—Suroît and her Émilie Sansfaçon bill.

We are working for health care by continuing to demand that the government increase health transfers. My colleagues from Montcalm and Joliette are working on this file.

We are also working for seniors by continuing to press for an increase to old age security. I want to commend my colleague from Shefford for her work on this file.

Today is a big day, a very important day for us. On this, our party's 30th anniversary, we have moved a motion stating:

That the House agree that section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, grants Quebec and the provinces exclusive jurisdiction to amend their respective constitutions and acknowledge the will of Quebec to enshrine in its constitution that Quebecers form a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that it is also the common language of the Quebec nation.

Today we are not asking the House whether it agrees with Bill 96 or whether it thinks Quebec should enshrine in its constitution that Quebecers form a French-speaking nation. We are calling on the House to acknowledge a reality.

● (1230)

The amending formula to section 45 allows, or rather would allow, since I am hoping to hear in all the speeches that each and every one of us supports the motion, Quebec and every other province to amend its Constitution. That is a fact. Quebecers chose to use this tool to enshrine in their constitution that they form a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that it is also its common language. That too is a fact. I remind the House that our motion merely asks that the House agree, as I said before, that Quebec has the right to do this and that the motion basically uses the wording of the Constitution Act, 1982.

To clarify the terms of our motion for those watching, I will simply give the example of the term “nation”. A bit of research will tell us that, when applied to a state or territory, it can be synonymous with “country”. That is what we mean when we speak of the United Nations, of which Quebec cannot be a member because it is not sovereign.

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The motion states that Quebec is a nation. What does that mean? It is not about becoming a country. The motion calls on the House to recognize that Quebecers form a nation. The *Larousse* dictionary defines the word “nation” as a large community of people, typically living within the same territory and having, to a certain extent, a shared history, language, culture and economy. The *Robert* dictionary defines “nation” as a group of people, generally large, characterized by awareness of its unity and a desire to live together. This is what today's motion is all about. I do not know what my colleagues think, but it makes me think a lot about Quebecers and what we are experiencing today.

No matter how we turn the question over, it is obvious that Quebecers form a nation, especially since October 30, 2003, when the Quebec National Assembly unanimously adopted the following motion: “That the National Assembly reaffirm that the people of Québec form a nation.” We agree that passing this motion will reinforce the consensus in Quebec.

There is a reason the Quebec National Assembly specified that it was reaffirming the existence of the nation of Quebec. In fact, this resolution reiterated what all Quebec governments have been saying for decades, namely, that the Canadian confederation is a treaty of union between two nations. Members spoke about this earlier.

Obviously, Quebecers' conception of their nation has changed over the years. We see ourselves less and less as a minority within Canada and increasingly as a separate nation with its own territory called Quebec and a national government called the Government of Quebec.

Anyone who joins us on this great adventure to build a French-speaking society in North America is as much a Quebecer as the descendants of the 17th-century French colonists, and that is a good example of the Quebec nation's inclusiveness.

In closing, I would like to talk about an experience I had a few days ago. I want to recognize Jessy Gareau, a young graduate from the Centre collégial de Mont-Laurier who signed an open letter in the *Journal de Montréal*. He is only 21 years old and he wrote the following, and I quote: “to adopt the necessary measures in our time to save French in Quebec”.

I commend Jessy, and I am sure that—

• (1235)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker: Order.

I am sure the hon. member will have the chance to continue following questions and comments.

The hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her heartfelt speech. It is clear that the Bloc Québécois is proud to support and promote the French language and can be counted on to do so.

My question is this: Is there anything my colleague would like to say that she did not have time to tell us?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: That is a great question, Madam Speaker. I will take only 30 seconds to answer it.

It is about doing more of what we have been doing for the past 30 years. Our leader talked about the fact that we hear more and more people speaking French on the street. People are proud of our French language, culture and songs, among other things.

Today, we are taking note of that. We cannot disagree on that.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I want to share her enthusiasm and love for the French language, especially with the children of newcomers. I find it very touching.

Would this motion recognizing that French has been the official language since 1974 and the common language not hinder the National Assembly from recognizing indigenous languages, the languages spoken by those who lived on our land before the first settlers arrived?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Speaker, I agree that there are various steps to take. Today's step is specific recognition, an acknowledgement regarding the French language in Quebec.

I spoke earlier about inclusion. We are a big family. We can discuss this with my colleague. We are making a clarification. The motion introduced today recognizes the Quebec nation with French as the main language spoken.

• (1240)

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Madam Speaker, the subject we are debating today is pretty straightforward.

Quebec is a nation. The Conservatives made that declaration in the House in 2006, but it was followed by the words “within a united Canada”. We have deleted those words because they are not really relevant, and that is not what Bill 96 says. It seeks to enshrine in the Constitution that Quebec is a nation. The first observation is quite obvious.

Can this be added to its constitution? Constitutional experts agree that it can. Quebec is a nation with French as its common language, the official language.

Is anyone in the House surprised to me hear me say this? No, of course not.

French has been the official language of Quebec since 1974 and, I would remind the House, its only official language. No one should have a problem with enshrining this in the Constitution.

Does this threaten anglophones in Quebec? Not at all. The anglophone minority in Quebec is among the most privileged in the world, and that will not change.

When Bill 101 was introduced in 1977, some people panicked. Some wanted to move away.

[English]

He said, “If you don't like 101, take the 401.”

[Translation]

These people wanted to leave because they thought that it would be the end of their benefits and their rights, and I dare not use the word privileges. When I look at Quebec today I can say that I am not worried about the anglophone minority. It has its universities and no problem getting services in English or using that language throughout Quebec. I have a hard time when someone tells me the opposite.

Is Quebec a nation? The member for Joliette mentioned Lord Durham. In Quebec that individual wanted to extinguish our nation. He believed that Quebecers were a people without a history or culture and that our salvation was assimilation. That is what Lord Durham used to say. When the member for Joliette mentioned Lord Durham in the House a year ago, there was applause and I never got over it.

I am not talking about Lord Durham to reiterate that dark prediction. In his day, he wanted francophones to assimilate. Today we are talking about French and there are 32 of us here who only speak French in the House. That is one way to thumb our nose at Lord Durham. We can be proud of that. We have been here for 30 years, proving Lord Durham wrong.

I did not bring up Lord Durham just to grumble about him. He said some interesting things, and I will even quote him. In 1838, the Queen instructed Lord Durham to find a solution to the Patriote rebellion. He said, "I expected to find a conflict between a government and a people, but instead found two nations at war within the same state." Even Lord Durham said there were two nations in Canada. That is not something we made up.

The Quebec nation's name has changed over time, but it well and truly exists. Quebec and Quebecers are a paradox. They are resilient yet threatened by an anglophone sea and a federal government that has always wanted to weaken their nation.

• (1245)

In 1867, our status as a minority in Canada was institutionalized. We accounted for 33% of Canadians and one of the four provinces. From the federal government's perspective, we were a province. That was Lord Durham's goal. We were on our way to the sad fate Lord Durham had in mind for us.

Resilient to the core, we fought back with the revenge of the cradle. Many francophones went to the United States. Names such as Cartier and Barrière became Carter and Gates. Over the course of two waves of emigration, two million people left for the United States. Even so, the people resisted, producing very large families with 10 children on average and sometimes 14 or 15. Many families had 14 children and 170 grandchildren. Sometimes name tags were needed to tell who was who. That was Quebec in the 19th century. The people fought back through the revenge of the cradle.

The fact that Quebec is a nation is how we managed to resist being swallowed up by the Canadian federation. While the Canadian state subverted the people of Quebec, the Quebec nation became a vector for our survival. The Quiet Revolution, which drove economic growth, gave Quebecers access to management positions. At the time, we were told that we were born to accept crumbs. Who stood up to challenge that notion and to say that we were capable of

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managing a business and achieving great things? Who stood up to say that we were going to build dams to prove it?

The Government of Quebec made room not just for French-speaking Quebecers but also for Quebecers of all kinds. It told us that we were capable of achieving great things. We were masters in our own house, as Jean Lesage used to say.

Bill 101 was adopted in 1977, and this legislated the use of French as the language of Quebec. Yes, there are anglophones in Quebec and we do protect their rights. We were eventually proven right. Anglophones were protected, which was a good thing, as they are part of Quebec's landscape. We can be proud of Leonard Cohen. That is the how it is in a modern Quebec. Nevertheless, Quebec has a common language, and everyone needs to understand it. It is important.

On the one hand, the Government of Quebec helped us resist, peacefully of course. On the other, we were crushed. In 1982, the word was multiculturalism. Quebec was no longer one of two founding peoples. It was no longer one of four provinces, not even one of 10 provinces. It was just one of many other cultures. That was our new status. That is what the federal powers that be had in mind for us. To make that happen, the government set out to dismantle Bill 101 piece by piece, turning everything upside down and threatening our survival.

The Prime Minister boasted about how Canada would be the world's first post-national country, but Quebec will never be post-national because Quebec is a nation. All 32 Bloc members are here to make that clear and to tell the federal government that it must respect what Quebec wants and what the Government of Quebec wants to do to protect our reality, our language, our culture and our future.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, after such an inspiring speech, I can understand that our colleagues are somewhat hesitant to rise. I will be delighted to do so, first to congratulate our House leader, the member for La Prairie, who is an esteemed colleague.

He mentioned something that I believe to be very important in our discussions today and that we have often heard from our colleagues from English Canada. He spoke about Quebec anglophones, who are part of the fabric and part of Quebec society. Quebecers are often described as people who are a little cold towards those who are not or do not consider themselves to be Quebecers, as was understood at one point.

I believe that Quebec will not form a nation without everyone who belongs to that nation. My colleagues also believe and are convinced of this. A Quebecer is someone who decides and chooses to be a Quebecer.

I would like to ask my colleague from La Prairie if he believes that we should improve how we explain our national project to these groups of anglophones and allophones who, and we truly believe this, are part of the society that we want to establish and part of the Quebec we dream about.

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• (1250)

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments made by my colleague, the member for Drummond.

Quebec gives pride of place to the anglophone minority. Quebec anglophones have contributed much more than what they think. They are important to our demographic fabric. I mentioned Leonard Cohen, but there are others who have worked on becoming and being, in their own way, a source of pride in a modern Quebec. They have their place and we will defend the place they occupy, without forgetting our place.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for La Prairie for his speech.

In today's motion, I think that there is consensus, not unanimity, on the three parts. We have minor concerns about the recognition of indigenous languages by the Government of Quebec. We would not want that to undermine or contradict that recognition.

My colleague is also his party's House leader, and I would like to hear what he thinks about the following.

What does he think about the fact that today is the day on which the Liberal government decided to introduce its bill to modernize the Official Languages Act?

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, that is a very good question. All I can say to my colleague is that the fact that the government is tabling this bill today, at the end of the session, when we have a whole series of bills on the table, makes me think, with the added threat of an election, that this is nothing more than a pre-election ploy. That is what I think. If the Liberals really want to work for official languages and for French in Quebec, all they have to do is vote tomorrow in favour of the bill introduced by the member for Beauport—Limoulu to apply Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses.

If the Liberals are serious, that is what they will do tomorrow.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his impassioned speech. We can clearly feel his pride, which we share, on the issue of the Quebec nation.

Earlier, he talked about births in Quebec and how Quebec has worked to maintain its francophone demographic weight. I would like to hear what he thinks about the challenges of maintaining this demographic weight now that Quebecers are unfortunately having fewer babies.

What could he tell us about the issue of demographic weight? What can be done to help increase the francophone demographic weight in Quebec?

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, I would like to read from a poem about immigration and welcoming immigrants, written by a man I consider to be the greatest poet in Quebec.

Inside my four walls of ice
I take my time and my space
To prepare the fire, the place
For the people of the horizon
And the people are of my race

We are welcoming immigrants with open arms because, as my colleague rightly pointed out, our population is declining. We want an integration model that enables us to welcome immigrants and help them prosper in Quebec.

• (1255)

Mr. Darrell Samson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to the motion moved by the Bloc Québécois. I will be sharing my time with the member for Hochelaga.

In my speech, I will be talking about who I am and where I come from. I will, of course, also talk about the Conservatives' record, our successes as a government, the Bloc's motion and the plan to modernize the Official Languages Act.

I am a proud Acadian from Nova Scotia. I come from Isle Madame, a small island just off Cape Breton Island. Isle Madame is about 14 kilometres by 11 kilometres, and more than 97% of residents speak French.

I also want to point out that the Samson family monument in Lévis was erected in honour of brothers Jacques and Gabriel to commemorate Canada's 100th anniversary.

As members know, I grew up in a minority setting in Nova Scotia. French-language education was not guaranteed. I did all of my schooling in English because there was no French school. However, I remember my father saying in 1969 that Canada was going to change and that bilingualism and the two official languages would be part of the new Canada.

As well, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was adopted in 1982, and section 23 guarantees minority language education rights. This section has been enormously helpful for communities across Canada. Starting in 1990, francophone school boards were created in provinces across the country. In 1996, the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial was founded in Nova Scotia, and there were finally French schools across the province.

In 2005, I became the executive director of this school board, a position I held for almost 11 years before being elected as a member of Parliament. It is a remarkable and interesting fact that during those years, the number of students doubled.

In 2015, I was elected as part of the Liberal government, and I sat on the Standing Committee on Official Languages for four years.

I was also the founder and president of the Liberal caucus of official language minority communities. In addition, I was elected president of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie and vice-president at the international level. Clearly, the work is still going on, not only in Canada and Quebec, but also internationally. That is very important.

Let us now talk about the Conservatives' track record. Today, the Conservatives are talking about everything that they are going to do, but one need only look back at what they accomplished during their 10 years in office to see that we need take no lessons from them in this regard.

In 2006, the Conservatives did away with the court challenges program, which we reinstated in 2017. They gutted the Translation Bureau. They reduced the number of employees so that they could give contracts to translation firms, whose quality of work is much lower than that of Translation Bureau employees.

What is more, the Conservatives did not make any additional efforts to increase francophone immigration, and the targets were not met.

When we took office, we reinstated the Mobilité francophone immigration stream. We also awarded additional points to francophone immigrants under the express entry program.

In their 10 years in office, the Conservatives never increased funding for the language communities. In contrast, we enhanced those agreements by increasing funding by \$500 million over five years.

Our government has had other successes. When it comes to education, we signed the very first strategic agreement with the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones.

A year ago, we saw a complete enumeration of rights holders, who are classified into three categories. As part of the 2021 census, members of this community were able to answer questions about being rights holders.

• (1300)

In addition, our government has revised the official languages regulations on service delivery, adding 600 designated bilingual offices across Canada, a very significant increase. We have also partnered with the provinces to put in place a multilateral early learning and child care framework that includes an official languages clause guaranteeing linguistic minorities their fair share.

The Bloc Québécois talks about its motion as if it were going to change the world, but it forgets that there are many Quebecers and many francophones in our party. We agree that Quebec is a nation within Canada and that French is Quebec's only official language. We already know that the only province that has both of Canada's official languages as its provincial languages is New Brunswick. The other provinces are officially English, but Quebec is French. We already recognize that, just as we recognize that Quebec has the right to amend its own constitution, within the parameters of section 133.

Our government recognizes that French is in decline. In the Speech from the Throne, we made it clear that we would not only protect French outside Quebec, but also within Quebec. Our government recognizes the importance of Quebec and its role within Canada. As the only French-speaking state in North America, Quebec has a special responsibility to promote the French language throughout Canada. The vitality of French in this country depends in part on its actions and its connection with francophones living in minority communities.

The Quebec government supports the Canadian francophonie in various ways. Our government supports francophones and French in Quebec and supports linguistic minorities across Canada. That is why I am so proud to be part of our government. I am also proud of the bill we introduced today. We will protect and promote the use of

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French across Canada, including Quebec. We will protect linguistic minorities. We are currently modernizing the Official Languages Act. That is very important, because we are going to ensure the vitality of our institutions and our communities.

We will ensure that bilingual justices are appointed to the Supreme Court. We will ensure that French is promoted in Quebec and across Canada. We will ensure that linguistic minorities across Canada are protected and promoted. We will ensure that francophone immigration is protected and promoted both within and outside Quebec, which will continue to be responsible for selecting and integrating immigrants within its territory.

In conclusion, we clearly recognize the two linguistic minorities in Canada. We have been there to protect and strengthen them. We will be there in the future to continue that work. We also recognize that, if we continue to work together, we can fulfill the aspirations of Quebecers and linguistic minorities in Canada.

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, whom I like very much. Among other things, I like his accent; it is so fluid.

I know that my colleague is in favour of the Bloc Québécois motion and will vote in favour of it, I am sure. I would like his impression of the amendment that was proposed this morning by other colleagues who would like the wording of our motion to include the words "in a united Canada".

• (1305)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his work at the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. We have a good working relationship.

As I said in my speech, Quebec is already a nation within Canada. We recognize that and we will continue to work to ensure that the inspiration of Quebecers continues to develop within Canada.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I know that as somebody who is a francophone in a minority setting, the parliamentary secretary will understand that I fight as hard as I can for francophones in my constituency. He will also know that Campus Saint-Jean, the university in my riding, is under threat and that the federal government has told members of my francophone community to be patient.

I would like to ask the member three questions: When will Campus Saint-Jean be notified of funding? How much funding will Campus Saint-Jean receive? How will that funding be applied?

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Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, my colleague has three very important questions. I wish I had a crystal ball, so I could answer those questions as well as I would like to.

I know our government has been working very closely with the members of the Saint-Jean university and the community. We have had several meetings, which I know the members of Parliament from the region have been involved in. We are there at the table working to find ways to ensure this university can continue to do the work required and support minorities right across this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for his speech.

As the member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles said earlier, it is music to our ears to hear all the sounds, tones and accents in French that are coloured by people's homelands.

The parliamentary secretary is a great example of the beauty of our beloved language. This is also the intention behind what we, the Bloc Québécois, are introducing today. It is about recognizing our love for this language, including with its many accents.

Madam Speaker, you have no idea how delighted my party colleagues and I are when anglophone members make the effort to speak in French. We know that it can feel somewhat awkward to express oneself in a language without perfect proficiency, but it is really touching and makes us very happy when members do make the effort.

I heard the parliamentary secretary say in his speech that the Bloc Québécois was trying to change the world. That is not at all what we are trying to do. Actually, we are trying to bring people together. Perhaps our message is not getting through, based on the amount of negative comments about francophones on social media for example.

I would like to put the following question to my colleague because he lives in French in an official language minority community.

Does he have any advice for us on how we should communicate our message about the importance of preserving the French language?

Maybe we are doing something wrong and he could provide some advice.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and comments.

As I mentioned in my speech, Quebec has always been there for francophone minorities across Canada. That is very important, and we have always been very appreciative. We worked closely with him in several areas. Earlier, I spoke about francophone immigration, which is very important for the linguistic minority and for Quebec. We must work together.

The clear message he is looking for is our message, that is, our party is there to protect Quebecers and to work with them. We have a strong, French, English, bilingual and united Canada.

• (1310)

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as a proud Quebecker and member for Hochelaga, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the motion of my colleague from Beloeil—Chambly.

I moved to Quebec when my parents and I immigrated to the province more than 40 years ago. I am a child of Bill 101 who grew up proud of being a Quebecker. Today, I work and live in French, the language that I also share with my children. Over the years, I have become steeped in the values, ambitions, language and culture of Quebec. I consider myself a Quebecker first and foremost. I chose and deeply love our nation.

Nationalism is not exclusive to one parliamentary group. Our identities are not mutually exclusive, they are complementary. We can be proud Quebecers and hope that Quebec is robust, but still believe in the strength of a federal model. It is our duty, as Quebecers, to focus above all on the aspects that unite us and allow us to thrive in the model that Quebecers have chosen and that we have chosen.

With its French language, Quebec is a strong nation with a unique identity, a strong artistic community and a growing entrepreneurial culture, a nation that is always looking for new ways to create in French. These are certainly distinctive traits that give our Quebec nation its unique identity.

Quebec nationalism belongs to me. It belongs to all Quebecers. Our nationalism transcends political parties. It is about affirming that Quebec's future is intimately linked to its ability to assume its rightful place in Canada and the world. It is about affirming that Quebec is a model of language protection and immigrant integration, and that Quebec can pass on its national pride to future generations and the rest of the world. We must work together to ensure a sustainable francophone future for those who come after us. Let us focus on our similarities and our common goals to create a unifying discourse that respects Quebec's unique character and builds an influential nation.

By supporting Quebec's desire to enshrine its unique francophone character in its section of the Constitution, we are looking toward the future. Let us remain squarely focused on the future and join forces with Quebec, particularly when it comes to protecting the French language. We need to ensure the survival of French if we want to keep it and our linguistic duality alive. I would like to remind members that, in 2016, the House recognized that Quebecers form a nation within a united Canada. That was 15 years ago. The Quebec nation is clearly a flagship province and the cradle of the francophonie in North America.

Our government is the first federal government to recognize the decline of French. We clearly recognized that we need to work together to do more, a lot more, to protect French across Canada, including in Quebec. We are determined to take all the necessary legislative and administrative steps to make that happen.

Let us remember that, in the 1980s, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms provided for the principle of advancing the equality of status and use of our two languages. This principle of advancing the equality of use and status required significant efforts to protect and promote French in our institutions and communities. However, we know and see that the use of French is in decline, despite the charter and provincial legislation, including that of Quebec.

Last year, in the Speech from the Throne, our government established that defending the rights of francophone minorities outside Quebec and defending the rights of the anglophone minority in Quebec are a priority, but it also clearly stated, for the first time, that among our two official languages, French is in decline.

In a North America with more than 360 million mainly anglophone residents, we must protect our nine million francophone Canadians, but also the demographic weight of francophones, not only in Quebec, but across the country. That is what we must continue to do.

Last February, my colleague the Minister of Official Languages tabled in the House the reform document entitled “English and French: Towards a substantive equality of official languages in Canada”. It is a statement of our vision for modernizing the Official Languages Act. At the time, we announced our intention to modernize the act to ensure lasting protection of the French language across Canada and in Quebec.

• (1315)

The Prime Minister made it clear in the House when he said, “the best way to ensure a bilingual Canada is to ensure that Quebec is first and foremost a francophone Quebec.”

Our government tabled a bill in the House today based on this reform document. We firmly intend to keep our promises, which include recognizing French as the official language of Quebec. Like all other provinces, Quebec will also have to respect the protections that the Constitution provides for both official languages.

We will recognize the predominant use of the English language in Canada and North America, and therefore the imperative to protect and promote the French language. The act will further promote and protect francophone minority communities across Canada. However, it is important that we recognize the French fact in Quebec.

This legislation will also specify and list the areas in which the federal government will be required to act to protect and promote French. The act will recognize the key role that the Canadian government will play in encouraging federally regulated businesses to promote French. French must be present throughout Canada, in Quebec and in Montreal as a language of service and a language of work.

Business of Supply

Quebec has an essential role to play in these changes to our language framework. This is a historic initiative and the first of its kind since the Official Languages Act was first adopted in 1969. We are introducing a bill that recognizes the particular circumstances surrounding the French language by first recognizing its status within the Canadian francophonie.

As a francophone Quebecker, I want to close by saying that I am just as concerned as my Bloc Québécois colleague about the decline of French in Quebec and in Montreal. That is why our government recognized the need to protect the French language in Quebec, as the demographic weight of francophones is declining.

It is time to modernize the Official Languages Act. We are already working on it, without waiting for the Constitution to be amended.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, I salute my colleague. I am encouraged to hear that she feels comfortable and connected to the French language, much like each and every Quebecker. I would like to think that she will vote in favour of our motion.

In the second part of her speech, she talked about what her hon. colleague was up to. We have been wanting to talk about this reform for months. Why, then, was it introduced today, when there are just a few days remaining in the parliamentary session? It will be very difficult to move forward with this bill when we know full well what could happen in the coming months.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her important question.

Our government has been working on the official languages issue for months and years now. Last February, the minister had already announced that we would introduce a bill to modernize the Official Languages Act. That is what we did today.

The thing to keep in mind today is that the government means business. Many of us Quebeckers, on both sides of the House, are strongly committed to protecting the French language right across Canada, but especially in Quebec.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): I apologize, my French is not very good.

[*English*]

The Liberal government has promised legislation that would protect minority language rights, including post-secondary education in minority language communities. When will the government announce financial support for Campus Saint-Jean?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague. I want to congratulate her on her speech in the House last night, which I listened to very carefully.

I would like to say to her that I also sit on the Standing Committee on Official Languages, which examined the case of Laurentian University. I want to assure my colleague that our government is firmly committed to protecting the French language, particularly when it comes to French-language education.

Business of Supply

● (1320)

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Madam Speaker, let me start by saying that it will be my great pleasure to share my time with my hon. colleague from Drummond.

I want to express just how honoured and moved I feel to be taking part in today's debate. This Bloc Québécois motion is about the core of who we are.

In my past life, I had the opportunity and the immense privilege to be a member of the House of Commons and the National Assembly of Quebec. My swearing in here in Ottawa was not a moment of celebration because I spent the whole time thinking about my Acadian ancestors who were deported on the grounds that they refused to pledge allegiance to Her Majesty. I was thinking about my Canadian ancestors who were not allowed to hold positions in government if they refused to swear the oath of allegiance.

When I first arrived at the National Assembly of Quebec, the swearing-in ceremony was a solemn and uplifting experience. The oath of allegiance in Quebec is the same as the one here in Ottawa, but we also pledge allegiance to Quebec's constitution and its people. Every member of the National Assembly of Quebec, no matter where they are from, what their first language is or what faith they profess, swears an oath to the constitution and people of Quebec.

To me, that makes all the difference in the world between the oath of allegiance we must swear here in the House of Commons and the oath of allegiance we swear at the National Assembly of Quebec. In the latter case, we do not need to explain to anyone, regardless of their ethnic origin, the religion they practice or their mother tongue, that Quebec is a people. It is assumed and patently clear.

Nor do we have to explain to Quebec MPs that there is a constitution of Quebec, which unlike the Constitution of Canada is not written in black and white on paper. They are constitutional conventions, I would even say constitutional traditions and a certain number of founding documents, including the Charter of the French Language, which establishes that French is the only official language of Quebec and the common language of all Quebecers.

The purpose, in the spirit of Camille Laurin, was to ensure that in every schoolyard in Quebec, young Quebecers speak French to one another, no matter their origin, religion or mother tongue. Quebecers are a people.

As early as the 16th century, natives of this country were no longer called French. They were Canadians on Canadian land, and Acadians on Acadian land. Those who were born in this country were already no longer being called French.

After the conquest, a distinction was made between the English—who had just settled on the land, or more generally the British because of course there were Scots as well—and Canadians, who were descendants of the French. When the English started to identify as Canadians, descendants of the French started distinguishing themselves by referring to themselves as French Canadians and in Acadia as Acadians.

● (1325)

There was a pivotal moment called the Estates General of French Canada, during which Quebecers asserted that they were not just French Canadians, because of their territory, their history and their distinct character, especially with respect to the law. Unlike the rest of Canada, Quebec uses civil law, not common law.

All these distinct characteristics meant that Quebecers, not unlike Acadians, whose identity was forged by the absolutely horrific deportation, began to distance themselves from a French Canadian identity and embrace a Québécois identity.

People from Sri Lanka, Romania, Nigeria and Argentina found it difficult to adopt a French Canadian identity because of the history associated with that name, but it was much easier for them to identify as Quebecers. In my previous stint as a federal MP, I debated this with some of our colleagues who were very attached to the notion of French Canadians. There was an integrative element to the change that came about in Quebec during the 1960s in the wake of the Quiet Revolution.

In the wake of the Quiet Revolution, we wanted to affirm the French character of Quebec through Bill 22, which was introduced by Robert Bourassa's government, as well as through Bill 101, which was introduced by René Lévesque's government in 1977. However, in 1982, a major change occurred, namely, the unilateral patriation of the Constitution, including the integration of a charter of rights and freedoms, which led to the invalidation of entire sections of the Charter of the French Language.

Today, we are seeing the results of that. Despite this protection, French has lost ground, even in Quebec. I commend this government for recognizing, for the very first time in the history of Parliament, that French is in decline, including in Quebec. I am willing to do that.

I am of Acadian descent and proud of it. I have always said, and I will say it again here, that the fate of Quebecers is closely linked to that of Canada's francophone and Acadian communities and their fate is closely linked to that of Quebecers. That is why it is extremely important for Quebec to be able to reaffirm its French character through Bill 96, which was introduced by the current government led by Premier François Legault. That bill proposes using a provision of the Constitution Act, 1982—the same Constitution that gutted entire sections of the Charter of the French language and that has led us to face the tragic fact that French is in decline in Quebec too—in order to reaffirm the fact that Quebec is a nation and that French is its official language and the common language of its members.

Now, does this mean, as in the days of the Estates General of French Canada, that Quebec wants to distance itself from the rest of French Canada? Of course not. On the contrary, I think that the more Quebec is able to affirm its French character and its distinctiveness, the more it will be able to extend its influence to all francophone and Acadian communities in Canada, and even in the United States, because I believe, and I reiterate, that our fates are intimately linked to each other.

• (1330)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, what a wonderful testimony. It is very interesting to hear from colleagues with various experiences who can speak about where they are now.

My question for my colleague is very simple.

What will happen after the vote, which, in theory, will pass? What actions or consequences will result from this motion for the Quebec nation?

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, unlike others, I believe that words have meaning and that words are not innocent. I believe that the Government of Quebec is fully within its rights to include in the Constitution Act, 1982, under the provisions introduced in the Constitution of 1867, the fact that it is a nation, whose official language is French, which is the common language of all Quebecers.

I am convinced that this law, which can certainly be improved by the members of the National Assembly, will reaffirm and reassert, if I may say so, the National Assembly's authority to better protect the French language in Quebec.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank and congratulate my colleague from Montarville for his brilliant speech. He is passionate about the language, francophone culture and Quebec culture, and has been a great defender of them since the beginning of his political battle.

The question I would like to ask my colleague has more to do with the bill that the government has chosen to introduce today, the day the Bloc Québécois is proposing a motion that is intended to be unifying, that is intended to be peaceful and that calls for the recognition of Quebec for what it wants Canada to see in it.

I would like my colleague to give me his impressions on the relevance and the opportunism of introducing this bill today.

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Madam Speaker, I think my colleague is quite right to point out that it is a strange coincidence to choose this very day when the Bloc Québécois is proposing this motion to finally come up with a bill that has been announced for ages, and to introduce it so late in the day that it will not even be possible to discuss it before the adjournment, and possibly not before an election.

As a result, introducing this bill does not really commit the government to anything; it is a symbolic gesture meant to show that the Bloc Québécois is not alone in wanting to defend the French language and that the Liberal government also has a fine bill to amend the Official Languages Act. What else does it have to offer? Beyond the symbolism, because the government's gesture will remain symbolic, what else is there? That is what we are interested in.

Business of Supply

I understand that the current federal government wants to protect French, not just in Quebec, but elsewhere in Canada. However, that must not remain just wishful thinking. It must not remain just words. As long as legislation remains unpassed, it is nothing but words.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am honoured to rise to speak today on this special day as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of my party, the Bloc Québécois.

Contrary to what some uncharitable souls have said, the Bloc Québécois has always been relevant. As evidence of this, for our opposition day, the Bloc Québécois is moving a motion to have the French language recognized as the official language and the only common language in Quebec. Through our actions, the Bloc Québécois is forcing the government's hand to some degree, and now the government is taking this opportunity to introduce its bill on reforming the Official Languages Act. It is bizarre, to say the least, shall we say.

That said, I will now get back to the subject at hand. Today I want to talk a little more about the Quebec identity and my beloved French language. We all have different reasons to be proud Quebecers. One of the things I am most proud of as a Quebecer is precisely our language. There was a time when I used it as a tool, one that I have always tried to respect, to use well and to pass on to my children and those around me. By default, the way we express ourselves reflects on those around us; we have an influence.

Like it or not, Quebecers have always been a distinct nation. My colleagues who spoke earlier stressed that repeatedly. In the 18th century, Bougainville said of Quebecers, "It seems that we are a different nation". Governor Guy Carleton said that the province of Quebec is completely different from the others and that these special circumstances cannot be ignored. In 1976, René Lévesque said, "We are not a small people. We may be something like a great people."

The status of French in Quebec is very worrisome. French has always been a language that needed to be protected and maintained, but it has never been in danger until now. I do not want to get caught up in figures, but the number of people in Quebec who use French as their primary language has not dropped below 80% in decades. That demands a response. That means we need to take action.

The first thing we can do is to at least acknowledge this state of affairs and recognize that Quebec must be supported, protected and valued. Decisions must be made, political decisions, decisions by citizens, by residents of different regions of the country to learn to speak to us, to learn to respect us, to learn to communicate and to learn to share this love that we have for this language.

I put the question to a few colleagues. Perhaps we did not get things right. Perhaps we did not properly convey our message. That is possible. I might surprise my colleagues. I am going to tell that about my love and affection for Canada.

Business of Supply

I know that my colleagues will say that it is difficult to believe that I had a life before politics because I am so young. However, in a previous life I had the great pleasure and privilege of being the host of a cooking show on television. For a few years there was an English version of this show. I urge colleagues not to Google it.

While filming this very rewarding show, I had the privilege of travelling across Canada. I went to Peggy's Cove and tasted one of the most memorable chowders. As I talk about it, I am getting hungry, my mouth is watering and I want to go back there. I fished for salmon in Miramichi. I cannot tell you how many times I ate peameal bacon sandwiches at the St. Lawrence market in Toronto while on my way to the magnificent Niagara region. I shopped at West Edmonton Mall. I rode horseback in the Calgary foothills. I visited Vancouver countless times. I love that city and that area. Who would not love the magnificent Okanagan Valley? I saw Whistler and other places, and I still have many places to visit.

• (1335)

In all my discoveries and travels across Canada, one thing stands out. Despite all of the amazing places I have discovered and the wonderful people I have met and bonded with, bonds that continue to this day, I always felt that I belonged to another nation and that my identity had a home somewhere else. I felt that way every time I came back to Quebec. I had nothing against the rest of Canada. My head was filled with memories, my heart was grateful, but whenever I came back to Quebec, I felt the way an Italian might feel returning to Italy after a trip or a Spaniard might feel returning to Madrid. I felt like I was coming home. This showed me in a clear, obvious and concrete way that I belonged to the Quebec nation. That did not prevent me from truly loving my neighbours, the Canadians, but Quebec was my nation, and it still is today.

I have always been convinced that the best way to promote something, whether it is a simple idea or a societal undertaking like the one my colleagues and I hold dear, is through persuasion, not division. There is no shortage of persuasive arguments for the great undertaking that my colleagues and I are advocating for. French, a beautiful language that sounds as melodious in spoken form as it does in song, will always be the most charming conveyance for those arguments. No other language in the world sounds as good in song. No other language in the world makes wordsmiths as happy as French does. Our language is the envy of the entire world. People have told me that our language is so beautiful, but it sounds so complicated and they wish they could learn it, master it and be able to make it sound the way we do. What a compliment.

As I said earlier, when our colleagues in the House make the effort to speak French during their interventions, we are very touched and honoured. I am honestly proud when my colleague from Kitchener—Conestoga conducts sound tests at the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage in French, because he is taking French courses and he wants to show us the progress he is making in learning French. I find that touching.

I am also touched by the fact that the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka will be travelling to La Pocatière again this summer to take French courses. I think that is wonderful, and that is what is so great about our undertaking.

Anglophone artists have chosen to write and sing in French because they prefer the way it sounds. It is a magnificent language for music. I commend the greats like Jim Corcoran, whom I have always admired. I have always been a die-hard fan of his. Born in Sherbrooke as an anglophone, he chose to express himself in French because he loves our language. He still has his charming little accent when he sings, but he is one of the most incredible wordsmiths, one of the finest songwriters that Quebec has ever known, yet he is an anglophone.

The motion we are moving today simply calls on the House to acknowledge a reality and the will of Quebec to enshrine in its constitution that Quebecers form a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that it is also the common language of the Quebec nation. There is no trap there. It is not a non-confidence motion. It is a peaceful motion that simply calls on the House to recognize Quebec as it wants to be seen, in other words as a proud, full nation that is welcoming and open to everyone who chooses to be a Quebecer.

• (1340)

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, our colleague makes us want to carry on and talk about people like Vigneault, Leclerc and Ferland. On June 24, we will celebrate our national holiday, and it will be an opportunity to remember just how proud we are to be a nation whose only common language is French.

I also want to come back to something that he said. I too see this Bloc Québécois motion as an opportunity for recognition, not a threat.

At the same time, I am wary of support that seems to be fleeting rather than heartfelt. Of course, we are not the only ones capable of loving the French language.

Does my colleague agree that, without the Bloc Québécois, this debate to stand up for, defend and promote the French language as the common language of Quebec would never have happened during this Parliament?

• (1345)

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. Unfortunately, I have to answer yes. There are issues that Quebec cares a lot about, and all members of the Bloc Québécois promised to defend and represent the values and interests of Quebec in the House of Commons.

Without the Bloc Québécois here, many of Quebec's concerns and interests would likely be simply swept under the rug or shelved for later on the pretext that they are not pressing or urgent. Without the Bloc Québécois here working hard, I am afraid that many of the issues that Quebecers care about would still be forgotten today.

Business of Supply

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I really enjoyed the part of my colleague's speech where he took us on a virtual tour of Canada, showcasing its beauty and vastness. I completely agree with him on that. However, I also appreciated what he said about how Canada is indeed a magnificent country, as are many other countries, but it is not our country.

I think he captured Quebec's Frenchness. Quebec is not yet a country, but it is only a matter of time because that is what we truly want, and we are working to make it happen. I would like my colleague to comment further on that. It is what I would consider an esoteric factor that makes our English Canadian colleagues deeply uncomfortable because they do not understand how anyone can love Canada yet feel that it is not their country.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Montarville for his question.

It is certainly something I find difficult to explain. For some time now, the more I think about it, the more I believe we should perhaps do things differently and change the way we communicate and share our vision and our plans.

I always thought we would do better to be good neighbours than difficult bedfellows. When it comes down to it, we would be so much better off if we both had our full powers and our independence. Instead, we are stuck in a kind of shackle where we understand each other very poorly and where we are both somewhat retreating into our corners, holding positions that are perhaps more historical than factual or actual.

I also want to mention that I am a little disappointed that I am not getting more questions and comments. As I was saying earlier, our motion was not intended to be provocative; quite the opposite. I had hoped for a little more interest on the part of my colleagues from the other parties. I hoped they might express some curiosity about what is prompting us to move this motion today. I have to say that, in the end, it looks like maybe it does not interest them all that much, but I still wanted to point that out.

[English]

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

[Translation]

I was born in Ontario, in Niagara, surrounded by Franco-Ontarians. I chose to go to Quebec at the age of 25 to study civil law, and I settled there. That is where I made a career of teaching civil law in both French and English, and I had my children educated in French.

I am with the majority of Quebecers who identify with both Quebec and Canada. This is complicated, but I would like to remind my colleagues on the other side of the House that the vast majority of Quebecers identify not just with Quebec, obviously with pride, but also with Canada, with pride as well.

It is not every day that we have the opportunity to dwell on the procedure for amending the Constitution of Canada. My remarks will address the scope and nature of the indisputable authority of

provincial legislatures to amend their provincial constitutions. I wish to make three points today.

First, since Confederation in 1867, provincial legislatures have had the authority to unilaterally amend certain aspects of their provincial constitutions.

Second, while the exercise of this constitutional amending power typically relates to the machinery of government, it can nevertheless be carried out by a provincial legislature that wishes to amend its provincial constitution by adding provisions relating to the specific nature of the province.

Third, although the procedure for unilateral amendment by provincial legislatures allows for certain adjustments to a province's constitution, those adjustments must necessarily be limited to that province.

That means one province cannot affect another by this amending procedure, nor can it affect, by this amending procedure, other provisions of the Constitution of Canada or the norms whose existence was essential to the compromise leading to Confederation.

• (1350)

[English]

The provincial legislatures have always had the authority to amend their own constitutions. Section 92(1) of what was then known as the British North America Act, permitted provincial legislatures to exclusively make laws in relation to the matters that included the amendment from time to time of the constitution of the province, except in regard to the office of the lieutenant-governor. That provision was repealed and replaced in 1982. The authority for the provinces to amend their own constitutions is now located in section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, which provides that, subject to section 41, which deals with matters protected by unanimous consent procedure, the legislature of each province may exclusively make laws amending the constitution of the province.

As the successor to the provision under the former British North America Act, this provision has been held by the Supreme Court to be essentially equivalent in scope to its predecessor. For the legislatures to exercise the authority conferred by these unilateral amending procedures, all they need to do is legislate in the ordinary course. In short, then, we are not dealing with a new or even controversial power. Rather, it is a power as old as Confederation itself.

[Translation]

The constitutional amendments made under section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and under its precursor in what is now known as the Constitution Act, 1867, have generally been in connection with government institutions.

Business of Supply

For example, provincial legislatures initially exercised this authority to adopt legislation regarding their privileges and immunities. This authority also enabled the provincial legislatures to abolish their own upper chambers. When that happened, some provisions of the Constitution Act, 1867, the founding document of the Canadian Confederation, became obsolete.

For my last example, I will mention that provisions in a provincial law regarding the operation of the province's public service were deemed constitutional. There is therefore no doubt that the provincial legislatures can amend their province's constitution to a certain extent by adopting provisions regarding the operation of a provincial government body.

The instrument targeted by a constitutional amendment is important for determining the appropriate formula. That said, this factor alone must not be given undue weight. It would be impossible for a provincial legislature or for Parliament to indirectly amend the intangible provisions in the Canadian Constitution by adopting incompatible provisions in a separate piece of legislation.

The same is true for the rules of law in the provinces' constitutional texts. These provincial constitutions, along with the Canadian Constitution, are not all found within a single document labelled as the constitution. Rather, they consist of a set of texts, principles and agreements of a constitutional nature regarding the provincial governments. What matters is the nature of the amendment and the effect it will have. We would be putting form above substance if we were to only look at the title of the document being amended.

• (1355)

[English]

That being said, provisions enacted through the unilateral amendment procedure cannot amend the provisions of the Constitution of Canada, the supreme and entrenched law of the country. The authority that section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, provides is limited to amending the constitution of the province. To make an amendment in relation to any provision of the Constitution of Canada that applies to one or more, but not all, provinces would require proceeding by way of the bilateral procedures set out in section 43 of the Constitution Act.

This would be the case, for instance, if a province intended to make an amendment to one of the provisions that relates to the use of English or French language within the province. It is through this procedure that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was amended to include section 16.1, which enshrines the equality of the French and English linguistic communities in the Province of New Brunswick.

An amendment may also be beyond the authority of the provincial legislatures under section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, even though it alters the provision that bears on the operation of an organ of the government of the province. This will be the case where the provision is entrenched as being indivisibly related to the federal principle or to a fundamental term or condition of the union at Confederation. This is the case for section 133 of the Constitution Act, 1867.

While it relates to the use of English and French in Parliament, in the legislature of Quebec and in the courts, it cannot be amended

through either Parliament's unilateral amendment procedure or the provincial unilateral amendment procedure. Likewise, an amendment through the unilateral amendment procedure could not insulate provisions that conflict with the charter.

For instance, section 23 of the charter guarantees minority language educational rights to citizens of Canada. An amendment to this provision, which grants language rights to all Canadians in all of the provinces and territories, would require proceeding by way of unanimous consent procedure for amending the Constitution of Canada. This would require resolutions from the Senate, the House of Commons and the legislative assemblies of all 10 provinces.

That, however, is not what is being proposed by the bill introduced in the Quebec National Assembly. The amendment procedure relied upon in this case is the unilateral amendment procedure; because of this, the Constitution of Canada cannot be amended either directly or indirectly. The amendment may only relate to the constitution of the province. In that sense, the choice of procedure should guide our understanding of the proposal.

[Translation]

Keep in mind that the source of section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, goes back to the days of Confederation. This limited authority to amend certain aspects of a province's constitution is reflected in section 44 of the Constitution Act, 1982, which authorizes Parliament to unilaterally make certain amendments to the Constitution of Canada. These provisions recognize that Parliament and the provincial legislatures are equal partners in the Canadian constitutional structure.

While some elements of our constitutional order are, quite rightly, virtually immutable, others can still be amended in accordance with the constitutional architecture as a whole.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his intervention.

On the defence and protection of French in general, I would like to ask him this.

Why introduce a bill on modernizing the Official Languages Act today, when there are six days left in the session?

Does that mean there will not be an election this fall?

Hon. David Lametti: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Montreal for his question.

That is a question he should ask my colleague, the Minister of Official Languages. I know that she has worked hard throughout the session to move this bill forward, which I believe will be released shortly.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[English]

GOVERNOR GENERAL'S LITERARY AWARDS

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I would like to recognize two outstanding authors in my riding. They are both recipients of the 2020 Governor General's Literary Awards.

Eric Walters, accomplished children's author and one of the key founders of I Read Canadian Day, was the winner of the young people's text literature category with his book *The King of Jam Sandwiches*.

Dr. Madhur Anand, professor, author and scientist, was the winner of the non-fiction category with her memoir *This Red Line Goes Straight to Your Heart*.

I encourage everyone to read Canadian, and in particular during #IndigenousReads month, to show their support to our talented indigenous authors and illustrators. This also supports our publishers and our local bookstores. People can use the #IReadCanadianDay to share their favourite stories.

PARRY SOUND—MUSKOKA

Mr. Scott Aitchison (Parry Sound—Muskoka, CPC): Madam Speaker, as Canadians are now finally receiving their vaccinations, and we are slowly getting past this pandemic, Parry Sound—Muskoka is eager and ready to be open and welcome visitors again.

From the towering windswept pines clinging to the rocky shores of Georgian Bay in the west to the pristine canoe routes of Algonquin Park in the east, and from the Trent-Severn Waterway in the south to the Dokis first nation on the shores of Lake Nipissing in the north, the natural beauty of Parry Sound—Muskoka will rejuvenate one's soul.

Whether one camps, glamps or stays at a five-star resort, whether one prefer s'mores by the campfire or fine dining by the water's edge, whether one prefers the nighttime chorus of the forest or stage performances of world-class artists, Parry Sound—Muskoka is the destination.

To seasonal residents, visitors and tourists, Parry Sound—Muskoka is ready when they are. Let us bring on the summer.

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING IN SCARBOROUGH—AGINCOURT

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last week I was joined by the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, other levels of government and community partners in announcing funding for the Bridletowne neighbourhood centre in my riding of Scarborough—Agincourt.

This announcement marks the first substantial piece of non-transit infrastructure for Scarborough, and families will benefit from it for generations to come. Thanks to the investing in Canada plan,

Statements by Members

our government is providing more than \$26.7 million for this hub, which will house a 50-unit dialysis centre by Scarborough Health Network; spaces for child care, youth and seniors; a pool and fitness centre by the YMCA, a Hong Fook nurse practitioner clinic; and spaces for social agencies led by the United Way. This will all under one roof.

I am thankful to work with our partners in continuing the work of my late husband, former MP Arnold Chan, to provide this much needed space for our diverse community in which everyone can thrive.

[Translation]

30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ): Madam Speaker, today is the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Bloc Québécois. Thirty years ago, on June 15, 1991, I hosted the founding convention in Sorel-Tracy. On that day, Quebec rallied behind a party, its party, that would defend its interests unequivocally. Every day since then, the Bloc Québécois has fought on all fronts for the Quebec nation.

Today, by chance or a quirk of fate, our anniversary coincides with a historic debate on enshrining Quebec in Canada's Constitution as a nation whose official and common language is French.

Thirty years later, the Bloc Québécois is the only party that can present this measure to affirm Quebec. At every opportunity, the Bloc represents our identity, our values, our language and our culture. Thirty years and many historical events later, the Bloc Québécois continues to turn the established order on its head, and it is proud of the trust placed in it by the Quebec nation to be the standard bearer for its will and aspirations.

LOUISE HAREL

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is my turn to rise today in the Parliament of Canada to recognize an exceptional woman, Louise Harel.

Although we are not from the same political family, we do share a love for Hochelaga and its people. Louise Harel is a feminist, a sovereigntist and a proud resident of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve.

She was a member of the National Assembly for over 30 years in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve, held various ministerial positions and was the only woman elected President of the National Assembly of Quebec. Although she is already an officer of the Ordre national du Québec and a recipient of the Grand Cross of the Ordre de la Pléiade, I wanted to state that the City of Montreal has just awarded her the title of citizen of honour.

Statements by Members

Ms. Harel has dedicated her entire life to improving the lives and dignity of the most vulnerable, as well as to promoting intercultural ties and defending the French language. She leaves an immense legacy in Quebec, including the Pay Equity Act and legislation on family patrimony. I always found our discussions on diversity and the role of women to be truly inspiring.

Thank you, Louise, for your compassion and your integrity, for your many struggles for the common good and for continuing to be a model of a progressive woman of conviction.

* * *

● (1405)

[English]

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as this session draws to a close, Canadians are upset with the Liberal government's "do as I say, not as I do" attitude. The Prime Minister has failed to set a clear plan for international travel, and all of the jobs that go with it, yet he has no problem jet-setting into quarantineless, maskless, distanceless and, frankly, senseless behaviour.

The Prime Minister says he is appalled with harassment in the workplace and the mistreatment of women, but turned a blind eye to General Vance and gave him a pay increase. The government hoodwinks Canadians, saying it cares about public safety, but really it is targeting law-abiding hunters and sport shooters with one bill and reducing penalties for serious crimes in another.

Canadians want us back here in this place in September, not prologued like last year and not tossed into a pandemic election that we voted unanimously against, and hopefully hearing from a government that has deeply reflected over the summer and is finally ready to put Canadians' interests ahead of its own.

* * *

FUNDRAISING FOR CYSTIC FIBROSIS

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to recognize two people in Waterloo region who raised money and awareness for cystic fibrosis.

An amazing young man named Joseph turned four years old and used his birthday celebration to raise donations. His family arranged a drive-by parade. Joseph was dressed as a pint-sized Batman, and his front yard was transformed into Gotham City. People from the community, including me, drove past to safely wish Joseph a happy birthday and were able to donate to the Farwell4Hire campaign.

Farwell4Hire was started by Mike Farwell in memory of his two sisters, Luanne and Sheri Farwell, who both lost their young lives to cystic fibrosis. Mike runs his annual fundraiser doing odd jobs in exchange for donations. To date, Farwell4Hire has generated over \$650,000 in donations to fight cystic fibrosis.

I send my thanks to Mike Farwell for his passion, to my community of Kitchener—Conestoga for its generosity and to young Joseph, our own Batman, for showing that heroes come in all sizes.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, across the country Canadians have been coming together to grieve our past and present actions of discrimination and racism in this country, whether it is the long history of abuse toward our indigenous peoples as we unearth the tragic killings and disappearances of our innocent children at the hands of our institutions, or the recent rise of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, anti-Asian racism and xenophobia. I vow to do everything in my power to fight against hate in all its forms.

Last night I attended a vigil in Brampton commemorating the tragedy in London, where a family of four was killed solely because they were Muslim. Islamophobia has no place in Canada. Every Canadian, regardless of race and creed, deserves to live in peace and security, and my heart goes out to the victims, loved ones and the entire Muslim community.

As we build back better, all of us must step up to make our communities safer and more inclusive.

* * *

LYME DISEASE

Mr. Chris d'Entremont (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Lyme disease is a huge concern in Nova Scotia. People can suffer undiagnosed for years, pleading with their health care professionals to be tested and referred.

In 2018, Nova Scotian residents reported the second highest number of Lyme disease in Canada with 451 people. With these high numbers in such a small province, one would think we would have the best Lyme treatment program in Canada, but sadly, residents continue to travel outside our country for treatment.

While this is unacceptable in regular times, it is almost impossible during this pandemic. Bill C-442 was unanimously passed in 2014. This bill was supposed to identify and implement new diagnostic treatments or protocols for tick-borne illnesses, changes that have been painfully slow.

I recently read the story about Hailey Kane from the Annapolis Valley, a 17-year-old girl who lost her life to Lyme disease. Hailey's family can never escape the nightmare that is a result of this undiagnosed, untreated Lyme disease. We need to do better. We need to call on all levels of government to do better for these patients, who have had their quality of life taken from them or, worse, pass away before ever getting the help that they need.

• (1410)

RHONDA DAVIES AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEERS

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to honour Amber Caterer-Walsh for her 33 years of service as a volunteer at the Community Association for Riders with Disabilities, called CARD.

CARD's vision is to be in an engaged community in which individuals, not labels, dictate who they are and what they achieve. It provides equine therapy to children and adults. This year, Amber won the 2021 Canadian Therapeutic Riding Association's Rhonda Davies Award for Outstanding Volunteers for her volunteer service. She was described by her nominator as a special woman who devotes her time to help better the lives of those around her and in her community.

I thank her and the association for the work they do for disability inclusion, and today I remind Canadians that there is still time to provide their feedback for our country's first-ever disability inclusion action plan, which is open for an online survey by video, or by print and mail.

* * *

CANADA DAY

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada Day is a time to both celebrate and reflect, a time to embrace who we are as Canadians and all that has brought us here, a time to reflect on what we must protect or risk losing, a time to imagine a vision of what our country can become. To be Canadian means believing in diversity, respect and humility. To be Canadian is to be part of something bigger than ourselves.

Canada is a free and sovereign nation governed by democratic values, a charter of human rights and the rule of law. It is a country where Canadians alone define our future.

Our democracy is fragile, never to be taken for granted and always to be defended. The challenges we face today will not defeat us. For 154 years, we have overcome adversity and emerged stronger. We will do so again, together and united as one Canada, one country. Happy Canada Day.

* * *

WORLD BLOOD DONOR DAY

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was World Blood Donor Day. Here is how the United Kingdom celebrated it: For the first time, all donors will now be asked the same questions about their sexual behaviours in a gender-neutral manner, meaning that gay and bisexual men in monogamous relationships can donate blood and make a difference for the first time. Israel's new coalition government, on day one of its new mandate, pledged to end its gay blood ban.

By contrast, here at home, this is how the Liberals celebrated World Blood Donor Day: On Friday, they lost in court when they tried to silence a gay man for asking the government to keep the promise the Liberals made six years ago.

Statements by Members

The Conservatives are on record with a very clear and safe solution, just as the United Kingdom, just as Israel and just as numerous other countries around the world are doing. It is time to stop the court cases. It is time to stop the delays. It is time to end the blood ban in Canada, now.

* * *

[Translation]

LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, June is pride month for the LGBTQ+ community. Yesterday was World Blood Donor Day. However, in Canada, we do not have any reason to celebrate.

World Blood Donor Day reminds us that the Liberals disappointed people by breaking their promise to put an end to the ban that prevents gay men from donating blood. That is even more shameful given that it is pride month. This discriminatory measure was implemented as a result of the AIDS epidemic, a lack of knowledge about that disease and a strong feeling of homophobia. AIDS was even referred to as gay cancer.

Still today, if a gay man wants to give blood, he cannot have sexual relations for three months before donating. That is a stunning level of hypocrisy for a country that brags about being a model for LGBTQ+ rights. All members of this community feel marginalized because of Health Canada's rules.

Until the Prime Minister has put an end to the blood donation ban, he should leave it to members of the LGBTQ+ community to march in pride parades. The LGBTQ+ community believed in him, but he let them down. He needs to have the courage to keep his promises for once.

* * *

• (1415)

WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, June 15 is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

It is an opportunity to speak out about the suffering that some seniors experience. It is a problem that tends to be under-diagnosed. Many people suffer abuse and mistreatment, but they do not even identify their situation and are afraid of reprisals if they report their abusers.

Therefore, June 15 is an ideal opportunity to raise public awareness of this social issue, to encourage people to recognize it and to prevent all forms of elder abuse. The seven types of abuse include physical, psychological and financial abuse, as well as ageism.

Oral Questions

We know that COVID-19 has caused a lot of isolation and additional financial stress for seniors. In addition to being the main victims of the health crisis, they were at increased risk of poverty and age discrimination. Seniors have the same rights as all other citizens, and we must allow them to age with care, compassion and dignity.

* * *

[English]

SMALL BUSINESS

Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my riding of Kenora is full of natural beauty that attracts visitors wishing to enjoy the great outdoors. However, the small business owners in our communities are facing a second COVID summer and their life's work has been pushed to the brink.

These job creators face mountains of red tape and regulations at the best of times, and with the added failure of the Liberal government to secure our economy through the pandemic, these businesses face an uncertain future. Small business owners across the country cannot afford any more economic mismanagement from the Liberal government.

Canada's Conservatives have a plan to secure the future that includes recovering one million jobs and supporting every sector and region of the country. Canadians will soon have a choice. If local jobs are not their priority, they will have many priorities to choose from. However, if they care about securing Canada's economic future, there is only one choice and that is Canada's Conservatives.

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ATTACK IN LONDON, ONTARIO

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I pay tribute to the remarkable lives of the Afzaal family.

Salman, Madiha, Yumna and Talat were tragically killed nine days ago in a senseless act of hate and terrorism. My community of London continues to be in a state of shock, profound sadness and anger as we try to come to terms with what happened. This past Saturday, in a moving funeral service, we said goodbye to four remarkable people who contributed to our community and country in immeasurable ways. May they rest in eternal peace.

Let us also continue to think about young Fayeze, who is now out of hospital. Ensuring his well-being can be a shared responsibility.

To Canadian Muslims across our country: "Your sense of belonging and security is paramount. We stand with you in fighting to ensure Islamophobia is eliminated." In that spirit, I call and join with other MPs for a national summit on Islamophobia and ask that this be convened at the earliest opportunity.

All of us have a role to play in ensuring such heinous acts of hate and terrorism never happen again.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 300,000 Canadians have lost their jobs because of the Prime Minister's failed vaccine rollout. Canadians cannot live like this while the Prime Minister goes around meeting celebrities and claiming to be the dean of the G7.

How can this trip help recover the 300,000 jobs already lost by these Canadians who are losing hope?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me remind everyone what is really important to Canadians and what the House can do to support them as we finish the battle against COVID-19.

Unfortunately, over the past two weeks, the Conservatives have used every procedural trick in the book to delay debate on Bill C-30. Canadians expect better. They expect us to get this bill across the finish line.

* * *

[English]

HOUSING

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is not just the job market that is becoming unstable. Yesterday The Globe and Mail reported that a private investor purchased hundreds of Toronto homes just to turn a quick profit. It is no wonder housing prices are up nearly 40% this year. First-time homebuyers literally cannot afford more of the same from the government.

Does the Prime Minister really expect first-time homebuyers to compete with billionaire investors?

● (1420)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government introduced Canada's first-ever national housing strategy. As part of that strategy, we introduced the first-time home buyer incentive, which will help families achieve the dream of home ownership by lowering monthly mortgage payments without increasing down payments. We recently also expanded the first-time home buyer incentive to enhance eligibility in Toronto, Vancouver and Victoria by raising the qualifying income threshold to \$150,000.

Maybe the leader of the official opposition can do something to support our budget, which helps first-time homebuyers.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister admits it is his plan that is failing, and it is worse. According to Bloomberg, Canada is in danger of experiencing a housing market crash similar to the 2008 financial crisis. Unlike the Liberals and the minister, the Conservatives have a five-point plan to secure Canada's future, including for first-time home-buyers.

Can the Prime Minister guarantee Canadians that housing prices will stabilize and ultimately decrease before the end of the summer?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our record speaks for itself. We are the only party that has taken concrete action to create more affordable housing. We brought in the national housing strategy, now worth more than \$70 billion. We brought in the first-time home buyer incentive. We brought in the Canada housing benefits. We increased supports for the rental construction financing initiative. On every single one of these measures, the Conservatives voted against them. Not only did they do nothing while they were in government, but they continue to do nothing in opposition. The leader of the official opposition should turn around and help Canadians by supporting this budget.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, speaking of records speaking for themselves, falsifying one's service record, throwing Admiral Mark Norman under the bus and covering up sexual misconduct is not the record of a minister who can be trusted to implement the necessary changes at National Defence. With a record as shameful as that, it is no wonder that senior military leaders do not respect their minister. We cannot afford more of the same. The Canadian Armed Forces are literally falling apart before our eyes.

When will the Prime Minister fire his incompetent minister?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will take no lessons from the Leader of the Opposition when it comes to looking after the Canadian Armed Forces. Our government, when we put forward our defence policy, increased defence spending by 70% for the Canadian Armed Forces and put people first. We know that we have a lot more work to do to make sure that we are creating an inclusive environment in the Canadian Armed Forces, and we will get it done.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he says "an inclusive environment". Three years ago a woman came forward with an allegation of sexual misconduct against the top general, a close friend of the minister. The ombudsman brought the report to the minister three years ago. The minister fired the ombudsman, covered it up and failed that woman serving her country.

The minister, if he respects the institution he once served, should do the honourable thing and resign. If not, the Prime Minister must hold the minister to account.

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, I will take no lessons from the Leader of the

Oral Questions

Opposition when it comes to service to this country. We take all allegations very seriously, as I did, and immediately brought the information to the appropriate officials. No politician should ever start investigations.

Maybe the Leader of the Opposition could answer this question? Why did his previous government, when he was a minister in that government, appoint the previous chief of the defence staff when he knew information of the allegations?

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebec wants to enshrine in the Constitution that it is a French nation by virtue of its common language, and yet, members have been trying to add conditions since this morning. They are talking about a united Canada and about the rights of anglophones, which no one in the House has questioned.

Quebec is not asking for the federal government's opinion. Quebec is a nation, period. Quebec's common language is French; that is another period and that is even a law.

Does the government realize that Quebec is enshrining facts in the Constitution that are already the law of the land in Quebec? Quebec is not asking for anyone's opinion.

• (1425)

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under the Constitution Act, 1982, provinces have exclusive jurisdiction to amend their provincial constitutions.

However, it is important to remember that these additions to the Quebec constitution do not, in any way, change the scope of the other sections of the Constitution and that they do not, in any way, change Quebec's constitutional obligations with regard to the anglophone minority. We have been assured by the Government of Quebec that it will continue to respect its obligations.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we did not take the House by surprise. Three weeks ago we provided a notice that we would move this very motion today.

Today, we are being presented with amendments and conditions. However, Quebec is not asking for anyone's opinion. It is enshrining the reality in the Constitution. If members are intent on pointlessly questioning reality, that is their choice, but it changes absolutely nothing in the debate.

Does the government officially recognize that section 45 of the Constitution allows Quebec to amend it, and that Quebec will enshrine that it is a French nation?

Hon. David Lametti (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the proposed amendment would have provided greater clarity by reaffirming the position adopted by the House in 2006, while highlighting the rights of the English-language minority in Quebec.

Oral Questions

We have received assurances from the Government of Quebec that it will continue to fulfill its constitutional obligations with respect to the anglophone minority. We continue to be committed to protecting the rights of linguistic minorities across the country, including those of the English-language minority in Quebec. Today's motion is part of that effort, reflects the current law and recognizes the will of Quebec. That is why the government will vote in favour of it.

* * *

GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I spoke with Cherelle, a musician who cannot return to work because of the pandemic.

Nearly two million people across the country are in the same situation as Cherelle and are relying on the Canada recovery benefit to make ends meet. Despite that, the Prime Minister wants to reduce the help people get by \$800 a month.

Will the Prime Minister reverse this decision to cut help to people, yes or no?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our emergency support and recovery measures are helping to buffer the most serious economic impacts and continue to help Canadians put food on the table.

In order to continue supporting workers during this pandemic, we presented in budget 2021 a plan to extend the Canada recovery benefit.

[English]

If opposition members want to be helpful, they could support the budget implementation bill and get these supports into the bank accounts of Canadians.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what the minister is not acknowledging is that the government is going to cut the help that families need by \$800 a month in this budget implementation bill.

People like Cherelle, who is a musician and earns a living by playing gigs around the country, cannot go back to work. Millions of Canadians who depend on the CRB are going to be in a devastating position if the government continues with its decision to cut the help they need by \$800 a month.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Will he reverse his decision to cut the help that people need in the middle of a pandemic?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thanks to the Canada recovery benefit, Canadians have access to up to 50 weeks of benefits to help them in times such as the one the member opposite is describing. For the first 42 weeks of their benefit received, they can get \$500 and for the last eight weeks, it is \$300. We see this in conjunction with the wage subsidy and the new hiring program as a way to transition Canadians back to work and back to economic success.

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Prime Minister did what he had told all other Canadians not to do. He travelled abroad to the G7. While he was gone, business leaders called for him to immediately lay out a plan to safely reopen our economy. The chamber of commerce called for clarity and a timeline and said that Canada was a G7 outlier because the Prime Minister had failed to deliver a reopening plan.

While other countries are helping their businesses reopen, our Prime Minister will not even provide us with a plan. When will he do his job and stand up for Canadian businesses?

● (1430)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the real question is, when will the official opposition do its job and allow Canada to restart the economy? Instead of doing that, instead of understanding that now is the time to finish the fight against COVID and get back to work, the official opposition is engaging in dilatory, delaying tactics. In doing so, it is putting in peril the wage subsidy, rent support, the Canada recovery hiring credit, all measures we need to restart Canada.

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only is Canada behind the rest of the G7 in reopening its economy, the Prime Minister has made things worse by making the whole economy more expensive.

The rise in the inflation rate and cost of living is making it difficult for many Canadians to make ends meet. That includes major increases in the price of meat, fish, dairy, gasoline and, of course, the skyrocketing housing prices. Under the government's mismanagement, Canadians are falling further and further behind.

Why has the government not made life more affordable for Canadians?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me point out what is really posing a serious economic threat to Canadians and posing a real threat to what needs to be our national priority right now, which is finish the fight against COVID and support the Canadian economy as we come roaring back. The threat is Conservative delaying tactics, which are stopping us from passing the budget. That means the wage subsidy, rent support, Canada recovery hiring credit, the CRB are all set to expire this month.

[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to an article on the CBC, softwood lumber experts expect that prices will continue to go up. They are also saying that it could take several years before things get back to normal.

In the meantime, the United States is taking advantage of the vulnerability of our forestry sector and threatening our industries with tariffs.

Canadian workers had to deal with a pandemic last year and do not need any more problems. Why is the government leaving them defenceless?

[English]

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by unequivocally stating that duties imposed by the U.S. on Canadian softwood lumber are unwarranted and unfair. I have raised this issue at every opportunity, including with President Biden, with the U.S. trade representative and with the commerce secretary. As we have always done and we will continue to do, we are going to vigorously defend our Canadian softwood lumber industry, its workers and the hundreds of thousands of jobs that it employs.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have repeatedly assured workers in our softwood lumber industry that a new agreement with the United States will be negotiated.

It has been nearly seven years since they came to power, five years since the softwood lumber tariffs were imposed and three years since CUSMA was renegotiated, but nothing has been done to protect our forestry workers.

Does the Liberal government have any plan to stop talking and start taking action?

[English]

Hon. Mary Ng (Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are taking a team Canada approach, working hand in hand with the softwood lumber industry, with labour unions, with the provincial and territorial partners on all fronts. We have launched challenges in defence of Canadian softwood lumber. Consistently, Canada has seen victories that clearly demonstrate that our softwood lumber industry is in compliance with international trade rules and that Canada is a trading partner in good standing in the multilateral trading system.

We will continue to defend our softwood lumber industry and the workers that it employs.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the finance minister decided to delay her own budget by punting debate on that budget in order to ram through Bill C-10, this at a time when our unemployment is higher than the U.K., the U.S.,

Oral Questions

Japan, Germany, the G7 and OECD, and there are half a million missing jobs. That same budget said that all the pre-COVID jobs would be recovered by this month.

Will the finance minister keep her word and guarantee that every single pre-COVID job will be recovered by this month when the numbers come out early next month?

• (1435)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me remind the member opposite that, thanks to the resilience and strength of Canadians, Canada has recovered 81% of the COVID recession job losses. That is compared to just 66% recovered in the United States.

However, Canadians do need more support for our economy to come roaring back from the deepest recession since the Great Depression. They need the strong support measures in the budget, including the wage subsidy, the CRB and the Canada recovery hiring credit.

It is the Conservatives who are stopping the budget from being passed.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if she likes her budget so much, it is so strange that yesterday she decided to delay it. Maybe it is for the better that she is delaying her own budget. So far what it has delivered is the second-highest unemployment in the G7; the highest inflation in a decade; the fastest increases in housing prices, preventing the poor working class and young from ever owning a home; and the prospect of a forthcoming debt crisis. All I am asking is whether she will keep her promise from chart 35 in that same budget.

Will the government have reinstated all the pre-COVID jobs by this month, yes or no?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is a bit rich coming from that party. A few days ago, last Friday, about 10:30 a.m., the Conservatives decided they wanted to shut down Parliament. They moved a motion to shut down Parliament. They had enough work; they wanted to go out for cocktails, or drinks or whatever. We wanted to work. They wanted to shut down Parliament. Then we wanted to extend the hours and they refused. After that, they started filibustering.

Bill C-30 is absolutely essential. Canadians need that bill. We hope the Conservatives will stop blocking everything?

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to hear the Minister of Justice confirm that the government would vote in favour of the Bloc Québécois' motion. I understand that the federal government will acknowledge Quebec's wish to enshrine in its constitution that it is a French-speaking nation.

My question is for the Liberal Party whip. Can he confirm that all members of the Liberal Party will vote in favour of our motion?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the House has already debated the matter of the Quebec nation. You and I were both there. It has been confirmed. That debate was settled a long time ago.

As for the language, we recognize that French is the official language of Quebec. That is done. The Bloc Québécois is clearly not happy with that because it would have rather seen us argue and vote against the motion. That is not the case and the Bloc Québécois should be happy about that.

I want to point out that the Bloc Québécois does not have a monopoly over love for Quebec and the French language.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this morning the parliamentary leader said, and I quote, "Quebec has a certain amount of leeway that allows it to make changes, provided it is clearly stated that...the Quebec government's bill does not erode other laws that protect the language rights of the English-speaking community in Quebec."

Can the Quebec lieutenant explain to us why, every time Quebecers stand up for their right to speak French, Ottawa gets worried about English in Quebec?

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada cares about all of its citizens, including francophone minorities outside Quebec and the anglophone minority in Quebec.

What I do not understand is why the Bloc Québécois is not happy about the introduction of an excellent bill to strengthen French by my colleague, the Minister of Official Languages, about the fact that we recognized that Quebecers form a nation within Canada or about the fact that we recognized that Quebec's official language is French.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues could at least crack a smile today.

* * *

● (1440)

*[English]***ETHICS**

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are in the middle of a pandemic where most of the government staff in Ottawa have been avoiding travel, staying put and working from home, so it is quite the coincidence that on the day after the election was called in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Minister of Natural Resources would send two of his staffers under dubious reasoning to that

province. Wait a second, that does not sound like a coincidence at all.

Will the Liberal Party repay taxpayers for sending two ministerial staff, at taxpayers' expense, to help their friends in the provincial Liberal Party get re-elected?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be crystal clear: My staff followed all the rules to the letter. They, like myself, hold themselves to a high ethical standard. They adhere to all public health guidelines. They filled essential operational requirements to support me in my ministerial duties, including support at the TechNL summit in February. They campaigned on a single Saturday, on their day off, keeping in line with Treasury Board guidelines. All rules were followed to the letter.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that simply does not hold water. Canadians cannot believe that these staff were there doing anything other than supporting the minister while he was campaigning. It is always the same with these Liberals. When it benefits them or their friends, they will throw any considerations about ethics or pandemic rules to the wayside.

Now that he has been caught, will the minister commit to have the Liberal Party of Canada repay taxpayers for this inappropriate, partisan expense?

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they both followed the Treasury Board guidelines to the letter, the same guidelines that the previous Conservative government put in place. Section 3.5.4 states, "If a member becomes engaged in campaign activities on a part-time basis, [his or her] involvement must be on [his or her] own time and not during regular office hours." Both employees travelled to Newfoundland to support me in my ministerial duties. They provided essential, on-the-ground operational support. That is what happened here.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts.

The minister's staff arrived when the election was called in Newfoundland and Labrador. They stayed there for the duration of the campaign. They went door-to-door and cost Canadians almost \$9,000. Public health rules required workers to stay home. The minister knows that. He is trying to apologize by saying that he needed his staff close to him, but away from the department and their homes. He admitted that he broke the rules.

Is the Liberal Party going to reimburse Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this was one blustery Saturday afternoon. Every time the Conservatives get up and attack hard-working political staff, I think they do a great disservice to the sacrifices those staff make and to the time and effort they put in supporting us in our official duties. I am proud that my staff hold themselves to a high ethical standard, as do I. The staff who support MPs and ministers should be recognized for the hard work they do and not be subject to baseless, spurious attacks in this House. Let me reiterate that all rules were followed to the letter. There was no interference here.

The Speaker: I just want to remind hon. members that the hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable asked a question and I am sure he wants to hear the answer. I want to make sure the shouting stops back and forth.

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable.

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always the same thing with the Liberals. They are always willing to do anything and bend the rules to help their friends.

The Prime Minister, the Minister of Health, Dr. Tam, the Treasury Board, the provinces, all had one message at the time: stay home. That was not good enough for the Minister of Natural Resources and his staff. The rules do not apply to them; they are Liberals.

Not only does the minister deserve to be reprimanded, he also has to pay that money back to Canadians.

Will the Liberal cronies refund the \$9,000 to Canadian taxpayers?

[English]

Hon. Seamus O'Regan (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no matter how many times the Conservatives get up and try to twist the facts, it does not change the reality that all rules were followed to the letter. It might surprise members opposite that we on this side of the House respect our staff's private lives and, within reason, their right to do what they wish with their time off. My staff followed all the rules, the public health guidelines and the Treasury Board guidelines for a minister's office that the previous Conservative government put in place. Are the Conservatives really suggesting that the rules they put in place should only apply to Conservative staffers?

● (1445)

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, watch out, the Minister of Official Languages just woke up. She just announced the introduction of an official languages bill, but it is June 15 and Parliament closes in six days. She knows her bill has no chance of being passed, but she is still going ahead. That is called playing politics with the francophones of the

Oral Questions

country. It is Liberal cynicism at its finest. It is not serious in the least.

When will the minister really start taking an interest in the rights of francophones from across the country? Will it be after the next election?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we took office six years ago. For six years, I have been responsible for official languages in the government. As such, I take an interest in the rights of francophones across the country and of all the linguistic minorities of Canada.

Today is a historic day. My colleague should be happy. We introduced an important bill that seeks to better protect the French language and all linguistic minorities. There are no surprises here. This is consistent with our commitments in the Speech from the Throne and in the reform paper I tabled in February.

The question I would put to my colleague is the following: Will the NDP support our official languages bill, yes or no?

[English]

HOUSING

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, developers are buying up billions of dollars of single-family homes so they can profit off their rent. Not only is this not creating a housing supply, but it actually drives up the cost of home ownership. Similarly, they are acquiring low-rental properties and treating housing like a stock market, yet the housing minister's spokesperson is saying that everything is fine and the government is not interested in changing its housing policy. Left unchecked, the right to housing is just a myth and home ownership is but a dream.

Will the government support the NDP's call to increase affordable social housing and take aggressive action against the financialization of housing?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the New Democrats for finally waking up to the importance of investing in affordable housing. For their information, we have been investing in affordable housing from day one of our government. We have introduced the Canada housing benefit. We have more than doubled the rental construction financing initiative. We have increased investments in the national housing co-investment fund. We have even given more tools to non-profit organizations to protect subsidized units. We have so much ambition in this space, backed by significant investment.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***OFFICIAL LANGUAGES**

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as a proud Franco-Ontarian and an MP who represents a large francophone community, I am very pleased that the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages introduced a bill in the House today that seeks to achieve real equality and strengthen the Official Languages Act.

Can the minister tell us how this bill will support the minority language communities and French across the country, including in Quebec?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his question and his hard work as a proud Franco-Ontarian.

Today is a big day for official languages in Canada. Through a new bill on official languages, the federal government is fulfilling its responsibility to do more to protect and promote French in Canada while continuing to defend the rights of official language minority communities, of course. The federal government can and will be part of the solution to achieve real equality between French and English in Canada.

* * *

*[English]***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the seventh vice-chief of the defence staff since 2015 resigned yesterday because he went golfing with one of the two chiefs of the defence staff who are under investigation for sexual misconduct. This tragic narrative is a direct reflection on the weak leadership of the defence minister. The minister wilfully turned a blind eye to evidence of sexual misconduct against General Vance and refused to implement the Deschamps report. This is a dereliction of duty to the victims of sexual misconduct. Instead of leading by example, the minister failed our troops and lost their respect.

Will the Minister of National Defence do the honourable thing and resign?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will take no lessons from the member opposite when it comes to looking after the Canadian Armed Forces. When he was in government, the Conservatives cut from the Canadian Armed Forces.

Our government, with our defence policy, added 70% of additional money to the defence budget, putting our people first. We know we have a lot more work, and we will get it done.

• (1450)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister can say what he wants, but one thing is certain: Right now the Canadian Armed Forces is in chaos.

Things have only gotten worse since this minister took office in 2015. The minister is always saying that he is absolutely deter-

mined to bring about a culture change in the Canadian Armed Forces.

What did he do with the Deschamps report that was submitted in 2015? He did nothing.

Why did he not implement the 10 fundamental recommendations to protect women? We do not know.

Will the minister do the right thing and resign?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I stated, we are not taking any lessons from the member opposite when it comes to our actions on creating an inclusive environment for all in the Canadian Armed Forces. We will be putting our people first, as we have always done.

We know that we have a lot more work to do. We will be moving very quickly with Justice Fish's recommendations, and Madam Arbour will be providing greater guidance on how we can create the culture change that is absolutely needed in the Canadian Armed Forces.

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, eastern Ontario municipal leaders are leading our country when it comes to improved Internet and cell coverage in our region. They are ready to go with another massive project to increase Internet speed up to one gigabit per second for their households and their businesses. Recently, local Liberal and Conservative MPs heard the group tell the minister directly that her department is once again refusing to fund their projects. How can this be?

Why does the Liberal government continue to put up unnecessary roadblocks that delay projects that are ready right now to help our residents?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome my colleague to the team of Liberal MPs in this region who have been working to connect eastern Ontario to cell service and high-speed Internet since 2015. We have moved forward, we have funded projects and we continue to support Ontarians as they get connected to this essential service. My colleague is misrepresenting that conversation.

I appreciate the work that the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus has done, and I look forward to sharing more news with Ontarians about high-speed Internet service in their backyards.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was not even close to an acceptable answer. They cannot even get the okay to apply to the universal broadband fund that the minister and the government continue to tout provides better Internet access. One hundred and four heads of council in eastern Ontario are behind this project, and it is valued at \$1.6 billion.

No more wishy-washy teamwork. Can the minister just give a straight answer? It is very simple. Can the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus and the regional network apply through the universal broadband fund to improve through their gig project, yes or no?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again, I appreciate my colleague's concern, but I assure him that Liberal MPs have been working with the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus since before he had a seat in Parliament, and we will continue to do so.

In the coming days, we will have more news—

The Speaker: I am going to interrupt the hon. minister and ask her to start over. I am having a hard time hearing. I do not understand why, because this is usually a quiet chamber.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Speaker, I was congratulating my colleague for his interest in connecting eastern Ontario to high-speed Internet and I was assuring him that the Liberal members of Parliament in the region have been working hard to do just that with the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus since 2015. We are in regular conversations with them around the universal broadband fund. We are working with the Province of Ontario to connect even more households to this essential service, and we will have more news to come.

If my colleagues have additional questions or ideas, I am happy to work with them off-line. Please reach out.

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the series "Ottawa is 50 years too late", after declaring that French was an official language, the Liberals are proud to announce that Quebec workers have the right to work and to be supervised in French. I want to make sure that I understand.

Does the new official languages bill say that, from now on, there is only one common language for employees of federally regulated private businesses in Quebec and that it is French, or is it just that they have the right to work in French?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is the first time that we are going to recognize in the Official Languages Act the right to work in French, the right to be served in French and the right not to be discriminated against for being a francophone in federally regulated businesses in Quebec and regions with a strong francophone presence.

Oral Questions

I had the opportunity today to speak with my counterpart, Sonia LeBel, to ensure that the 55% of federally chartered enterprises in Quebec that are already subject to Bill 101 can continue to be under this system.

In the meantime, our government will fill the legal void. We are offering a new system that will protect French within federally regulated private businesses.

• (1455)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that does not really mean much.

What Quebec wants is not the right to speak French, but for the language of work in Quebec for all Quebecers to be French. We do not want to be able to speak French at work, we want to have to speak French at work.

Instead of introducing a bill that will never be passed, the government should simply support our bill that will ensure that the Charter of the French Language applies to federally regulated private businesses. That is what Quebecers want.

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): What Quebecers want is for their concerns about the state of French to be addressed and that this be done in federally regulated businesses and in the federal government and with respect for linguistic minorities.

That is what francophones in Quebec and across the country are asking of us and it is what all Canadians are asking of us. We are introducing an ambitious, robust and important bill, a quasi-constitutional statute. In the circumstances, for the good of the country and for the good of francophones, we hope that the Bloc Québécois will support it.

[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in June 2020, Canadian vegetable growers lost millions of pounds of vegetables because of COVID. For almost a year they have been asking for compensation for the losses they incurred, and they have been exceedingly patient. Recently, the Government of Ontario wrote to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food to ask for the activation of AgriRecovery for vegetable growers who incurred substantial losses and extraordinary costs.

When will the minister make funds available under AgriRecovery to compensate vegetable growers for their pandemic losses?

[Translation]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is indeed a certain number of risk management programs, including agrirecovery, that are available for producers facing exceptional costs for various reasons.

Oral Questions

The procedure is that the province consults us and its officials analyze the situation with our officials. As soon as the analysis is done, I will be pleased to share the response with the producers and with my colleague.

* * *

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, many agri-food, construction, agriculture and landscaping businesses are reaching out to me because they are short of employees.

This Liberal government is blaming a lot on COVID-19. The reality is that it has done nothing in the past six years about accessing foreign workers. Is it normal for certain applications to drag on for more than a year? It is unacceptable. The process urgently needs to be sped up to allow our businesses to stay above water and participate in the economic recovery. When will this government take action?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has doubled the number of temporary foreign workers in Quebec from 11,000 workers in 2015 to 23,000 workers in 2019.

Despite the pandemic, last year we supported the second-largest number of temporary foreign workers of all time and we are welcoming even more this year. We have already admitted more than 8,500 skilled workers in Quebec this year and we will continue to work together with the Government of Quebec to provide it all the immigrants it needs.

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[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my constituents are very frustrated with the government's handling of the border. The government has insisted on forcing Canadians into hotel quarantine despite the Liberals' own science expert panel recommending that the government scrap the program. These are the same hotels that have had reports of sexual assaults and a lack of food and water.

On what date will the Liberals finally listen to the science and end the hotel quarantine program?

● (1500)

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has some of the strongest measures to protect against the importation of COVID-19. We have been guided by science and evidence, and Canadians have made extraordinary sacrifices over the last year and a half to protect each other. We will continue to use that science and evidence as we adjust the border measures to reflect the best science and evidence, and to ensure that we protect Canadians from another surge of COVID-19.

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, climate change is rapidly affecting the world, especially poor and developing countries.

Can the Minister of International Development tell the House what Canada is doing to help these countries in the global fight?

Hon. Karina Gould (Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Vimy for her important question.

At the G7 summit, our government reaffirmed its commitment to meeting the international climate finance objective of \$100 billion a year for climate finance in the places around the world that need it most.

We also doubled our climate finance pledge from \$2.65 billion in 2015 to \$5.3 billion over the next five years.

Here at home, we are committed to reducing our emissions by 40% to 45% by 2030.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for four straight years, the minister of public works could only muster up a feeble “to be determined” when setting targets for government contracts for indigenous businesses, yet in the operations committee we heard evidence that public works invoked the national security exemption in order to sole-source a contract for PPE from China instead of from a qualified indigenous business.

Why is reconciliation with China more important to the minister than reconciliation with indigenous people?

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is inaccurate in his question. I will say the Government of Canada is committed to improving diversity in all aspects of government programming. That includes increasing participation of minority groups in federal procurement.

I would like to say that during the pandemic, PSPC awarded 40 contracts collectively worth \$130 million to 31 self-identified indigenous businesses. We have more work to do, but I am committed to increasing opportunities for indigenous businesses from coast to coast to coast.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Mr. Speaker, home prices have risen to an all-time high. While the minister is patting himself on the back, young Canadians and families are simply giving up the Canadian dream of owning a home due to historic price increases of almost 30% since last year.

Can the minister tell us, if his housing plan is truly perfect, why Canadians across the country are giving up on owning homes?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our national housing strategy is investing in the first-time home buyer incentive, which is a real help for first-time homebuyers.

What did the Conservatives do when they were in office? All they could offer first-time homebuyers was a \$750 credit. What a joke.

The national housing strategy is working. Since coming into office, we have invested over \$27.4 billion in affordable housing. In Edmonton, the city the hon. member comes from, we recently announced \$46.5 million through the rental construction financing initiative to build over 250 rental units. This is a national housing strategy that is working even in Edmonton.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is a joke is the Liberals' existing plan for affordable housing, which is not working for anyone. I have been asking for funding for affordable housing in Sarnia—Lambton for years. In our opposition day motion, we highlighted the failure of the government in this area.

Considering the Liberals voted against our Conservative motion with all of its common-sense solutions, I would like to know this: What is the Liberal government going to do to ensure Canadians can have affordable housing?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, fake outrage without real action and real policies is not a strategy.

Since coming into office, we have invested over \$27.4 billion in affordable housing. What is the Conservative record? It is \$250 million a year. Those are the facts.

It is really interesting to see a party that voted against the Canada housing benefit, that votes against the national housing co-investment fund and that votes against the rental construction financing initiative get up and fake outrage. Canadians can see through that. It is a joke of a policy. Get serious, Conservative Party.

* * *

• (1505)

EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND DISABILITY INCLUSION

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every day Canadians with disabilities face accessibility barriers in their workplaces and in their communities. Programs like the enabling accessibility fund are important to help communities and organizations become more accessible when costs are prohibitive.

Can the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion share with the House how our government is making communities and workplaces more inclusive for Canadians with disabilities?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I

would like to thank the member for Newmarket—Aurora for his advocacy for persons with disabilities.

The enabling accessibility fund is an important program that empowers communities and businesses to become more accessible for persons with disabilities. That is why, through budget 2021, we are tripling funding for the enabling accessibility fund so we can continue supporting the costs of renovations, retrofits and accessible technologies.

I am happy to share that we have recently launched a call for proposals for the enabling accessibility fund youth projects and mid-sized projects components. I encourage youth, non-profits and businesses to make applications so we can continue removing barriers in our communities.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, another Muslim woman was violently attacked in my city. She was walking in broad daylight when she was violently thrown face first to the pavement.

Muslim women in Edmonton have to tell their loved ones where they are going. They take photos of themselves when they go out in case they are attacked or go missing. Enough is enough.

When will the government table legislation on online hate? When will the government convene a national action summit on Islamophobia? When will Muslim women in Edmonton and in Canada finally be safe?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no Canadian should have to live in fear, yet we recognize that is the reality for far too many. Hate and racism do not belong in Canada, yet we know they exist.

There are systemic barriers that exist in Canada, and our government remains committed to doing everything we can. That is why we have Canada's anti-racism strategy. That is why—

The Speaker: I am going to interrupt the hon. minister and ask her to start—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Shouting across the aisle is not going to accomplish anything. Members can move to one side or the other if they want to talk, but shouting is not going to get us anywhere. I just want to remind members.

We will start over. The hon. minister.

Business of Supply

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious matter, and all members should take it very seriously. Canadians from coast to coast to coast are hurting. Racism exists in Canada, and every single one of us has a responsibility to do something about it.

Our government has brought forward measures including Canada's anti-racism strategy. Our government has put white supremacist groups on Canada's terrorist listing. Our government has committed to holding a national summit on Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of hate. We will work with all levels of government and all Canadians, and I look forward to working with that member.

No Canadian should have to live in fear. Unfortunately it is a reality for far too many. Every—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, for more than 40 years, the Government of Canada operated 29 racially segregated hospitals across this country.

I have heard first-hand accounts from indigenous elders about the horrors they experienced at the Nanaimo Indian Hospital. Researchers have exposed a range of atrocities at these hospitals including physical, emotional and sexual abuse, experimental medical and dental treatments, and sterilization without consent.

Will the government commit to a full, independent inquiry into Canada's Indian hospital system, and release all relevant documents for that purpose?

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, addressing historical harms committed against indigenous children is a crucial step toward healing and justice for survivors, their families and their communities.

The IRSSA, McLean, Gottfriedson and Anderson settlements represent historic milestones in Canada's efforts to address harms associated with attendance at federally operated institutions.

We know there are outstanding claims in other institutions, and we are committed to collaborative discussions with the provinces and territories and with all those affected on how to foster healing.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1510)

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—AMENDMENT TO SECTION 45 OF THE CONSTITUTION AND QUEBEC, A FRENCH-SPEAKING NATION

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to participate in this debate and to have the opportunity to highlight Quebec's beautiful culture and its language, French.

Canada has changed a lot since the Official Languages Act was introduced more than 50 years ago, and our linguistic reality has changed as well. French is in decline in Quebec and across the country, and francophone communities are worried about the future of their language and culture.

With the growth of the Internet and globalization, English has become more prominent. I am therefore pleased to be having this debate in the House. It is an important debate to ensure the survival of French across Canada.

I want to take this opportunity to talk about how our government is supporting Quebec's unique and vibrant cultural sector.

[English]

The Speaker: I am going to interrupt the hon. minister. There are two members who insist on having conversations at an elevated voice. I am sure they do not want me to name them. If they want to come together and talk, they can do that peacefully.

I will just leave that there for now, and hopefully the two will come together and discuss what they have to do in a very peaceful and quiet way.

The hon. minister.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Speaker, I was saying that I want to take this opportunity to talk about how our government is supporting Quebec's unique and vibrant cultural sector.

I think all members will agree that, owing to its excellence and diversity, this sector plays a key role in promoting the French language both in Quebec and across Canada, and even beyond our borders.

It is no secret. Thanks to globalization and technology, our artists are finding audiences in every country around the globe. In fact, our government eagerly promotes Quebec culture internationally, in addition to making it part of our diplomacy.

We are also making sure that we do not drown in the ocean of U.S. culture, and our Bill C-10 is helping us with that. A big part of the mandate that the Prime Minister has given me as Minister of Canadian Heritage covers areas of shared jurisdiction with the provinces and territories.

Hand in hand with Quebec, we have developed many of our cultural flagships. Together, we can continue to showcase our culture, while also ensuring that Quebecers and all Canadians have an arts scene that reflects them and their stories in their language.

Business of Supply

Our partnership advances our shared interests in different ways using a variety of collaborative mechanisms. All our levels of government are currently involved in extensive discussions, and we have very productive relationships. We already work together closely in many areas, such as cultural infrastructure, audiovisual production funding and arts funding in general. Our collaboration includes Canadian Heritage and the agencies and Crown corporations I am responsible for, such as the Canada Council for the Arts, Telefilm Canada, the National Film Board of Canada and a number of national museums.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit our cultural sector hard, harder than almost any other economic sector. Many stakeholders and residents of my riding expressed their support and appreciation for the initiatives rolled out to support the sector during this public health crisis. We worked hand in hand with our provincial and territorial partners to do this essential work, each partner's actions complementing the other's to ensure the survival of organizations and directly support artists and workers in the cultural sector.

Since people had to stay at home for many months, musicians, singers, actors, stage technicians and other industry professionals found themselves out of a job. Our museums, art galleries and theatres had to close their doors.

Over the past year and a half, my team, the public servants at Canadian Heritage and I kept in regular contact with our provincial and territorial colleagues through frequent intergovernmental and bilateral meetings, telephone calls, video conferences and written correspondence.

Our federal, provincial and territorial forum on COVID-19 gave us an opportunity to work together so we could share best practices, discuss what we had heard from our respective stakeholders, and do our best to ensure that no one slipped through the cracks, cracks that we all worked hard to fill along the way so that no one would be left behind.

For decades, the Government of Canada has been supporting Quebec's cultural industry through significant, ongoing investments. Combined with the action taken by the provincial government, these investments led to impressive, undeniable results. This solid tradition of support continued during the pandemic when both Ottawa and Quebec City stepped up to help our cultural industry.

In June 2020, the Government of Quebec announced its \$400-million economic recovery plan for the cultural sector, from film and television production to music and festivals. There have been many announcements of additional support since.

For our part, our government has offered unprecedented targeted support. On May 8, 2020, I announced new emergency funding for cultural, heritage and sports organizations. This \$500-million emergency funding has helped maintain jobs and support business continuity for organizations whose very viability was in jeopardy because of the pandemic, allowing them to survive this crisis.

Of this \$500 million, \$412 million went to the culture and heritage sector, with \$114 million, or more than 30%, going to Quebec.

• (1515)

That proportion reflects the historical strength of Quebec's cultural sector and the support it receives from the federal government, thereby ensuring the survival of the French language. More specifically, Quebec stakeholders received nearly a third of the emergency funding allocated by the Canada Council for the Arts, the Canada Arts Presentation Fund and the Canada Arts Training Fund. In the same vein, Quebec stakeholders received over 55% of the emergency funding allocated by the Canada Book Fund, as well as 25% to 35% of the funding available for the subsectors of magazine publishing, new media, television and radio.

Our government committed to supporting the arts throughout the recovery period. It is developing a strong recovery plan for everyone. Back in the fall of 2020, we created a \$50-million compensation fund for Canadian film and television production to stimulate the recovery of this sector, which supports tens of thousands of jobs across the country, many of them in Quebec. Since then, this fund has been doubled to allow for even more filming in the months to come.

Subsequently, the 2020 fall economic statement provided an additional \$181.5 million for the performing arts sector. This investment will help artists begin to create works that can be presented once the restrictions are lifted, cover additional expenses for the presentation of shows that comply with health guidelines, and allow our creators to develop their digital offerings, in addition to stabilizing the theatre, dance, festival and music sectors.

The last budget went a step further with an historic \$1.5-billion investment to assist the cultural sector's recovery. In addition to these targeted investments, various universal programs have also played a critical role in the survival of organizations and direct support for artists, creators and other cultural workers.

We already had the Canada emergency wage subsidy, the Canada emergency rent subsidy and the Canada emergency response benefit, and now we have the Canada recovery benefit. Without these measures that our government has deployed, far too many would simply not have made it through the past 18 months.

Thanks to the vaccine rollout currently taking place at a steady pace across the country, we can look forward to the coming months with some optimism. The coming months will offer us opportunities to share our culture, both with Canada and with the world.

One example is the Frankfurt Book Fair this fall, at which Canada will be the guest of honour. By participating in the book fair, we can generate more international interest in our authors by showcasing creative content from Quebec and Canada to the rest of the world.

Business of Supply

As I said earlier, the Department of Canadian Heritage has a long tradition of supporting Quebec's cultural sector, dating back well before the pandemic. For the 2019-20 fiscal year, Heritage Canada paid a total of \$240 million in grants and contributions to Quebec-based organizations, including \$101 million for culture, \$73 million for official languages, \$21 million for heritage and celebrations, \$17 million for sports, and \$9 million for diversity and inclusion.

Agencies connected to the department, such as the Canada Council for the Arts, Telefilm Canada and the Canada Media Fund, made financial contributions as well. Quebecers identify strongly with many of these agencies, which have become veritable cultural institutions in their own right.

Just look at Radio-Canada and the National Film Board, which have played and continue to play a very important role in the development and success of Quebec's cultural sector and Quebec society as a whole. These federal agencies help create jobs for thousands of people in Quebec and across the country. They are essential to the vitality of Quebec's film and television industry.

Funding for cultural projects and initiatives has also been provided. One such example is the Diamant theatre project. Two federal programs contributed funds to help a talented and world-renowned creator fulfill his dream in the heart of beautiful Quebec City. The investing in Canada infrastructure program contributed \$10 million, and the—

• (1520)

The Speaker: Order. Questions and comments, the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we know that English-language institutions, whether in health or post-secondary education, often receive massive funding from the federal government. The official languages program solely supports and protects English.

Does my colleague have any data on whether this is also the case for culture? Does he have data that quantifies support for francophone and Quebec culture as compared to support for anglophone culture?

In addition, does he agree that French should be the only common language, the language for integrating newcomers to Quebec?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his questions.

I would be pleased to provide him with details in writing, but I will come back to the same example I used in my speech. Quebec stakeholders received 55% of the emergency funds provided by the Canada Book Fund, and they also received between 25% and 35% of available funds for the magazine publishing, new media, television and radio subsectors. In all these cases, the percentages are higher, sometimes higher by far, than the proportion of the Canadian population that Quebec accounts for.

With respect to his second question, I believe that the House has already recognized the unique character of Quebec society, and I completely agree with that.

[English]

Mr. Ken Hardie (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a number of years ago a good friend gave me a really lovely collection of Canadian folk songs. In it are forgotten tunes from Quebec, which are absolutely delightful. It made me think that perhaps one of the best and most positive aspects of Bill C-10 was the notion that more of this Canadian content would be made discoverable to Canadians outside of Quebec, which would be an enriching experience right across the country.

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Speaker, this is one of the elements at the heart of Bill C-10, the discoverability of Canadian artists; francophone artists by anglophones in Canada, anglophone artists by francophones in Quebec or elsewhere in the country; the discoverability of indigenous artists, which are starting to emerge in different fields, whether it be music, dance, contemporary art; and so many other elements of our vibrant artistic scene.

That is why it is so important we adopt Bill C-10. That is why APTN and other indigenous organizations across the country have asked for the adoption of Bill C-10 as have quite a number of artistic and cultural organizations.

• (1525)

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his speech.

He talked a lot about the cultural industry and that is good, but it is not the subject of today's motion. I understand that the government recognizes the Quebec nation, but it does not necessarily recognize the fact that Quebec could be responsible for the language policy within its own territory.

If he recognizes that Quebec is a nation, why does he not recognize that with regard to language?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question.

However, I somewhat disagree with the premise of it. She said that the motion has to do with language and not culture. Honestly, since I became the Minister of Canadian Heritage, I have spoken to thousands of people across the country, and language is culture and culture is language. The two cannot be separated.

As members heard from the Minister of Official Languages, we support the French fact in Quebec and want to support it even further. We recognize that French is at risk across the country, which is why the bill to modernize the Official Languages Act is so important, so that the federal government, in partnership with other governments and other organizations in Canada, can work to strengthen the French fact in Quebec and across the country.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will start by saying that I am sharing my time with the member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix.

The Government of Quebec wants to enshrine in its constitution that Quebecers form a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that it is the common language of the Quebec nation. Why? I believe Camille Laurin said it best in 1977: “By proclaiming French as Quebec's official language and by recognizing the right of all Quebecers to use French in all facets of their lives, we are turning the language into a national public good, a common good for all Quebecers, the best way to promote cohesion and dialogue between Quebecers of different origins. We are giving Quebecers a way to express their identity to the world.”

Previously, the Gendron commission had recommended that the Government of Quebec make French the shared language of all Quebecers, a language that, being known by all, could be used as the instrument of communication in situations of contact between francophone and non-francophone Quebecers. That is what a common language is. The point is not to enable francophones to speak French with each other. The point is to give people who speak different languages a way to communicate with each other and belong to the same public space, nation and people.

As the white paper on Bill 101 explained, that is what we see everywhere else in normal societies, including in Canada, where English is the common language outside of Quebec. In other words, French should be the common language of Quebec, as English is in Canada.

We have heard a lot of people say that Quebec was already recognized as a nation in 2006 and that the matter is settled, but it is not settled at all. Making French the only official and common language is not merely theoretical. It implies tangible measures and actions. It is the essential condition to ensure the future of French and to make it the language of integration and inclusion of newcomers.

The federal government, which, need I remind the House, is the government of the anglophone majority, has dismantled Camille Laurin's and René Lévesque's Charter of the French Language through its financing of court challenges, through its spending power, through a Constitution and through a multiculturalist charter that was imposed upon the Quebec people in 1982 because it is a minority in Canada.

The 1982 Constitution has never been signed by any Quebec government. Since the Official Languages Act 51 years ago, and before that, I can hardly talk about how much discrimination there was against francophones. The Liberal government at the time decided that Quebecers were not part of the francophone minority and that only the anglophone minority in Quebec needed to be protected. This means that every year since then, tens and hundreds of millions of dollars have been used to anglicize municipal and Quebec public services, to over-fund English-only organizations, lobby groups and institutions.

The federal government began funding legal challenges to Bill 101 in 1978, and beginning in 1982, Alliance Quebec's legal guerrilla warfare was carried out under a Constitution that had been im-

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posed on a minority Quebec to weaken the Charter of the French Language.

Naturally, for the francophone and Acadian communities, this was better than the overtly “ethnocidal” system that existed prior to that. However, the institutional bilingualism imposed by the Official Languages Act does not work. French-language services outside Quebec are largely deficient, even where numbers supposedly justify them.

With each census, the rate of francophone assimilation increases despite the fighting spirit of the francophone and Acadian communities. While the Quebec government is working to make French the official and common language of all citizens of all origins in Quebec, the federal government is doing the opposite. Specifically, it is telling newcomers that there is not one, but two official languages, and that they can use the language of their choice.

● (1530)

In Quebec, all this federal interference against French, the official and common language, is precipitating the decline in French.

A few months ago, the Liberal government suddenly recognized that French was in decline. According to Quebec, it was about time because French had been in decline for at least 30 years and the decline is only accelerating. It is not tied to immigration, but to the anglicization of allophones and, increasingly, francophones.

In the Speech from the Throne, the government recognized that Quebecers are part of the francophone minority in Canada and North America. It is hard to believe that they did not know that. That has been the case since 1841. That is when the Act of Union was imposed to keep francophones in the minority.

The Minister of Official Languages made some nice speeches. She said that the Liberals will now defend French in Quebec. In the meantime, even within the federal public service in Quebec, the right to work in French is constantly being violated.

For example, a few weeks ago, the vice-president of the Quebec region of the Public Service Alliance of Canada told the Standing Committee on Official Languages that “systemic discrimination is deeply rooted in the federal government. It is taken for granted that English comes first and French second.”

While Quebec is rallying and its government is introducing a bill to acknowledge a national language, federal services offered in French continue to decline, no matter what the Minister of Official Languages says. We see examples of that nearly every day. Last week, the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions, a federal institution based in Montreal, was at the Federal Court of Appeal fighting hard to avoid complying with the right to work in French in Quebec for a public servant named André Dionne. The office has the backing of Canadian National, or CN, a Crown corporation, which is advocating for the right to work exclusively in English in areas not designated as bilingual, such as Toronto, but that right would take precedence over the right to work in French in Quebec.

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Here is another example. The Prime Minister's Office recently violated the Official Languages Act by providing the Standing Committee on Health with thousands of pages of unilingual English documents on its handling of the pandemic. The Liberals agree that French is an official language, but they are against the Bloc Québécois bill requiring sufficient knowledge of French as a condition of citizenship in Quebec.

Today, the Minister of Official Languages introduced her bill with great fanfare. She told us that the Liberals will recognize French as an official language of Quebec. Kudos for that, but she does not specify how. The issue is not whether French is an official language, because it has been for a long time. The issue is whether it is recognized as the only official and common language of Quebec. However, this is not the case.

Quebec wants to be solely responsible for linguistic planning in its territory. The Minister of Official Languages says no to Quebec. In fact, Bill C-32 likely weakens Quebec's bill by blocking the application of Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses in Quebec. The Liberals say that they will protect the right to work in French in these businesses, but that is not at all the same as making French the common language of the workplace.

The Prime Minister said that he is going to support the addition to the Constitution proposed in Bill 96, but he added that it will not have any legal consequences. It is a bit like the motion that was moved in 2006 to recognize the Quebec nation within a united Canada. It comes back to what the member for Mount Royal said earlier: he agrees as long as it does not change anything. When we ask the Liberals whether the government will fund the court challenges that will arise from this addition to the Constitution, they simply do not answer.

In summary, the Liberals talk a good game, but when it comes time to take action, they do not really do anything. The Liberal government is using an old strategy that is already well known. It is recognizing the decline of French and saying that it is going to take action. That is the same old strategy the Liberals used with their election promises, the same old strategy they have been using for a very long time.

Our national poet, Félix Leclerc, summed it up very well in one of his famous songs. He said, and I quote:

On the eve of the election
He called you his son.
But, of course, by the next day
He had forgotten your name.

● (1535)

Long live a free, French Quebec.

[*English*]

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his comments. However, I disagree with his position.

First of all, declaring Quebec a nation goes directly against the Quebec National Assembly, which in 1985 declared indigenous nations as nations within a nation. It also goes against constitutional

obligations, which Quebec is bound to, specifically section 22, which states:

Nothing in sections 16 to 20 abrogates or derogates from any legal or customary right or privilege acquired or enjoyed either before or after the coming into force of this Charter with respect to any language that is not English or French.

Does my hon. colleague not think that his responsibility as a member of Parliament is to respect and lift up our Constitution and its rights, which include aboriginal people's rights and title and the language rights of all Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I totally disagree with my colleague.

Just because Quebecers form a nation does not mean that the first nations do not form one too. There is not just one nation in Canada; there are many, and Quebecers form a nation. That does not take anything away.

In 1977, from the outset, Bill 101 established guarantees to defend first nations laws, and we totally agree with that. Quebec was one of the first to decide to negotiate nation to nation with indigenous peoples.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the speech by my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île.

I understand there is an anglophone nation that took advantage of its majority status to interfere with another nation, the Quebec nation. In the end, it had an impact on our development.

Just thinking out loud, would it not help Quebec's destiny, in terms of its development, if it were sovereign?

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts about that.

● (1540)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague knows the answer.

The only way to secure the future of the French language in Quebec and linguistic diversity in North America is Quebec's independence. What we are seeing today confirms that. Until that happens, we will continue to defend the French language and the Quebec nation. It does not take anything away from the English Canadian people or nation.

If the relationship were based on respect, it would be much easier. Unfortunately, it seems people absolutely do not want to give control to Quebec and let us secure the future of the French language. They do not want us to use French in Quebec the same way English is used outside Quebec. We are not even trying to make French the common language as much as English is. In the rest of Canada, 99% of language transfers are to English, compared to barely 50% to French in Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question follows up on what my colleague from Winnipeg Centre said. She made reference to indigenous languages and the importance of reconciliation. I am very curious. What is the Bloc's position on moving toward reconciliation by recognizing indigenous languages and supporting them in all regions of the country?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague did not listen to the answer I gave earlier.

We entirely agree with securing the future of first nations languages. As I said, Bill 101 was probably a pioneer in this area, because it contained guarantees for first nations.

I would like to remind my colleague that Canadians mixed with the first nations in New France and that we have very strong ties with the first nations. We support them wholeheartedly.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport-Côte-de-Beaupré-Île d'Orléans-Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, French is in decline in Quebec, and Quebec wants to be able to act freely, without impediment, to ensure its revival and development.

That is why the Bloc Québécois tabled this motion asking the House of Commons to agree that section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, grants Quebec and the provinces exclusive jurisdiction to amend their respective constitutions and acknowledge the will of Quebec to enshrine in its constitution that Quebecers form a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that it is also the common language of the Quebec nation.

The motion does not ask the House if it is in favour of Bill 96 or if it agrees that Quebec can enshrine in its constitution that Quebecers form a French-speaking nation. The motion only seeks to acknowledge a reality. The amending formula under section 45 allows Quebec to amend its constitution, just as all provinces are allowed to. That is a fact.

Quebeckers have also chosen to use that tool to enshrine in the Constitution that they form a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that it is also the common language used by the Quebec nation. That is also a fact. Since the motion simply calls on the House to acknowledge facts, we expect that it will not cause any controversy today and that it will be recognized unconditionally.

Quebec has the right to amend its constitution on its own. Our motion simply asks the House to acknowledge that right and uses the wording of the Constitution Act, 1982, which English Canada adopted without Quebec's consent. I want to emphasize that it was without Quebec's consent.

Today's motion is in no way asking for permission. Quebec has decided to do it and again, the House must recognize unconditionally that Quebec has this right.

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I would like to speak about Quebec and its people by speaking about human nature in its simplest and greatest form. Historically, human beings have had a need for security, based on a few principles: having a roof over their heads; having enough food for themselves and their families; and having access to health care and to an appropriate education, in accordance with their life plans their own nature.

The issue of life plans is central. Human beings need to belong to a community. They need relationships, and they need to form a group with other people, who become their allies in building a future full of hope. For such an enterprise to have a solid foundation, it must be based on a defining set of benchmarks and principles that make the group feel true to itself, thanks to the strengths and legacy of its predecessors.

Human beings are not avatars. They do not want somebody else to dictate what they should be at the expense of their true nature. Many scientists will confirm that courage and the need to be true to oneself outweigh any feature borrowed from someone else.

Therefore, human beings have, within their nature, a need to define who they are and will be through their own values and characteristics. By looking at their history, they recognize who they are. They see that they belong to a community which reflects what they consider to be the best version of themselves. When that is taken away from human beings, they lose touch with the community. They become bitter and indifferent. They abandon themselves, become somebody else and forget who they were.

That is when a person is said to have been assimilated. Some assimilate in spite of themselves, and others are forced to by circumstances. They see that their future and their prosperity lie in globalization and uniformity, and they agree to be alone together.

I would like to quote my good friend Louis-Jean Cormier, who is an artist: "We are all playing solitaire at the same time." For the benefit of my colleagues who think that art from Quebec is tacky and outdated, I would like to point out that Louis-Jean Cormier just won his third Juno award for francophone album of the year.

Like most Quebeckers, we like to gather together at the same time, in solidarity and with common values. We want to be together in our own way because, in Quebec, we know how to live together.

Human nature is the same everywhere. Just like Canada, Quebec is a nation with distinct attributes. Some resemble Canada's, while others are diametrically opposite, and that is what our motion refers to.

● (1545)

Like any normal nation, Quebec is defined primarily by what is distinct about it. This is the very essence of its personality and the pride of a nation. We are defined by what we are most proud of. We are proud to be standing up with our talents, our natural resources, our common values developed through humanity and evolution, and our language in our arms. This is what makes us distinct.

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In my book, as the granddaughter of a schooner captain, because my father and grandfather sailed the St. Lawrence River, as an islander, happiness is simple: being with family, speaking a language that we love because, for us, it is the most beautiful language, and that we will be able to make the wonderful human beings who join us learn to love, with full respect for the first peoples and for our mutual recognition, to grow in accordance with the common values that our recognized constitutional rights will allow us to adjust over time and according to existential needs, all together, at the same time.

This notion of “French as a common language and a Quebec nation”, which we are promoting in the House and which we hope will receive unanimous recognition in the House, is an exercise that makes sense. It is a matter of common sense, the kind that often eludes the House, which prefers political strategies that border on absurdity. This common sense approach requires us, the Bloc Québécois, which has been looking out and speaking for Quebec and the National Assembly for 30 years.

Recognition of the Quebec nation and its only official language is the indisputable foundation for the world to come. Let no one come and tell us that we are this or that because we simply and honestly want to protect and develop what we really are, what defines us, who we are.

Valuing what makes a people, a nation, distinct is not a lost cause, on the contrary. We would never lose the respect of other nations, socially or economically, by protecting our rights and our distinctive values. A people that no longer identifies with its mother tongue, with what sets it apart and makes it valuable, loses its essence and its innovative and creative energy. Back home, we would call that losing our sparkle. That is not going to happen.

However, a people prepared to stand tall, supported by its choices and deep convictions and the freedom to determine them, is secure, happy, fair, inclusive, balanced and extremely positive and productive. I would be remiss if I did not commend the great resilience and determination of the people of Quebec in that regard. Without this fight to protect these common values that characterize us, we would have disappeared.

Still, here we are, 32 members giving a voice to Quebec, and we will never stop fighting to ensure that Quebec get its fair share of recognition and its freedom. I take immense pride in defending the interests of Quebec in this House, as immense as the mighty St. Lawrence.

I would like to quote one of our most iconic poets, a songwriter and philosopher, the great Gilles Vigneault, but I will be putting my own spin on it.

[Member sang the following:]

Everyone uses their age
Their stones and their tools
To build their village
Their city and their country...
Everyone uses their age
Their stones and their tools
To build their village
[Their island] and their country

• (1550)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as already said, in 2006 the House of Commons adopted a motion recognizing that Quebec forms a nation within a united Canada. I was not here back then, nor was the member who just spoke. My understanding is that it was supported by the House and passed by the House.

Could the member reflect on why she believes that the Bloc would have supported that motion? Do they still support the motion? Was this something they gave any consideration to before they brought forward the motion today?

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question. Quebec began taking action to have the Quebec nation and especially its official language recognized, without conditions, quite some time ago. The Bloc Québécois has been fighting the fight for 30 years now.

Building on this momentum, various legislative steps over the years have enabled us to accept, vote on and advocate for the different steps that have brought us to what we are debating here today. We are debating this motion here today because French is declining in Quebec and we need to do something to address that right now. In order to do that, we need to have free rein and a free hand. That is why the Bloc moved this motion here today. We believe that it is more relevant than ever.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. I have the utmost respect for the language of Vigneault, Nelligan, Roy, Carrier, Gagnon and even Charlebois. This morning, the Bloc leader talked about the humility and pride of Quebec francophones, but what does my colleague have to say to Quebec anglophones who worry about the loss of their official language?

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. I meet anglophones from Quebec, including some that I know and others I call friends. They only want one thing and that is for us to do it together. In order to do that and to live together, Quebec must have the freedom to act.

What we are defending today is really the ability to sit down with our foreign-language friends and to decide the way we will live together. We want to be able to bring our friends to share our culture and language, and to allow us to discover theirs.

To achieve that, we need freedom and autonomy. That is what this motion requires—or, more politely, asks—of the House today. The phrase “together with them” seems fitting to me.

• (1555)

[English]

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages is alarming and francophone workers are being discriminated against in the federal public service.

Does the member think the Liberal government has abandoned the language rights of francophone workers? With the Minister of Official Languages tabling new legislation this morning, what does she think of the timing of this?

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Mr. Speaker, I consider it is too little too late. The fact is that this bill is more a setback than a step forward for the French language. In the present context, Quebec does not have any other avenue available than to be able to act on its own to put in place a system which will allow French to survive, develop and continue to be an economic force.

Let us not forget that, in every respect, francophones are an economic force in America and play an important role in the tourism industry. It is therefore very important for us to protect our language, and we know how to do that better than the government, whose bill comes too late and proposes too little.

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be able to rise virtually in the House today. First of all, I would like to inform you that I will be splitting my time with the member for Orléans.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that the lands on which we are gathered today are part of the unceded territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation.

I am pleased to join my colleagues to discuss the motion of the member for Beloeil—Chambly. I would like to thank all my colleagues for their interventions today.

Clearly, there is a great willingness among members to better protect and promote the French language, not only in Quebec, but also across Canada. On the issue of protecting and promoting French, I want to reassure my Bloc Québécois colleagues in the House and demonstrate that our government is indeed taking action and that it is doing everything possible to arrive at our common goal.

Earlier today, I introduced a bill to strengthen and modernize the Official Languages Act and recognize the true equality between French and English in Canada. Along with over 90 indigenous languages, our two official languages, French and English, are at the core of who we are as a country.

[English]

Our linguistic diversity brings us together, reinforces our federation and sets us apart from the rest of the world. In that sense, we can never take it for granted.

[Translation]

Today, as the Minister of Official Languages and in the context of this debate on the motion from the Bloc Québécois, I would like to give more details about the measures we have been taking to protect and further promote French across Canada, including Quebec.

First, I want to go back a little bit to the adoption of the Official Languages Act 50 years ago to build a state where French and English would both be central not only to our country but also to our lives. During the decades past, provincial governments even took measures to protect French, such as New Brunswick, which became

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constitutionally bilingual after an important constitutional process. The province of Ontario passed the French Language Services Act in 1986. As for Quebec, it proceeded to the adoption of the Charter of the French Language, which followed the recognition of French as the official language of Quebec in 1974, under Robert Bourassa.

Efforts were made to strengthen French, but also to protect our official language minority communities, for them to have access to services and education in their own language.

Since these tools were created, a lot of water has gone under the bridge. The world is changing, and our linguistic universe is affected. Globalization and the development of international trade at a dazzling speed have had the effect of imposing some languages to facilitate exchanges across borders. At the same time, digital technology, social media and online distribution platforms too often favour the use of English at the expense of French, and this has contributed even more to the erosion of the French language.

The facts are therefore clear in the eyes of our government: Our two official languages are not on an even playing field. We must do more to make sure that the Canadian francophonie remains strong and that access to our two official languages is democratized. I am thinking in particular of learning opportunities from early childhood to post-secondary education. We must also modernize our language policy. Our actions must aim at reaching true equality between our two official languages, which means we must do more to protect French, including in Quebec, which is a minority in the North American context.

Obviously, we must continue the work undertaken years ago to protect linguistic communities, more precisely official language minority communities. It is our constitutional duty. The federal government must also take full responsibility in its area of jurisdiction and use all available tools to promote and protect French. That is also our duty to francophones of Quebec and Canada. My answer to the Bloc Québécois today is that we share the same goals in that regard.

The first provision included in the reinforced Official Languages Act reflects my point since it is about the linguistic landscape of Canada. Indeed, it recognizes the dynamic nature of provincial and territorial regimes.

● (1600)

That is why I can assure my hon. colleagues in the Bloc Québécois that the new law also explicitly acknowledges that Quebec's official language is French.

[English]

Our bill recognizes too that Quebec has specific obligations when it comes to the use of both official languages in courts and in provincial legislatures. As I said, it is our duty as the federal government to ensure that these constitutional rights are respected.

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[Translation]

The modernized Official Languages Act also recognizes people's right to be served and to work in French in federally regulated businesses in Quebec and in regions with a strong francophone presence all across Canada. The system we are proposing will be in sync with that of Quebec, and it will be just as robust.

We intend to take full responsibility in our area of jurisdiction and work with federally regulated private businesses to ensure that they play their role and respect their new linguistic obligations. We are proposing that these rules be phased in, by regulation, over a period of three years for federally regulated private businesses located in Quebec that have at least 25 employees, and five years for businesses located in regions with a strong francophone presence that have at least 50 employees.

This legislation aligns with our government's coordinated efforts to better protect French and our firm commitment to work entirely within our jurisdiction to ensure the rights of official language minority communities.

With regard to government institutions, we are proposing robust measures that would enable the federal government to lead by example. It is important for the Supreme Court of Canada to be bilingual. It is also important for the public service to respect its linguistic obligations, as it is Canadians' primary point of contact with the federal government.

For a language to be strong, its culture must also be strong. That is why we will protect Radio-Canada. We will give our cultural institutions, such as the National Film Board, Telefilm Canada and our national museums, the tools they need to showcase francophone cultural content. We will align our linguistic policy with our cultural policy and vice versa.

We will also work to showcase the Canadian francophonie internationally. Canada is proud to be a bilingual country where French is alive and well. Strengthening our role within the international Francophonie will enable us to further solidify our leadership among the world's francophone countries.

I also want my colleagues to know that the bill I introduced today will strengthen the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages to ensure compliance. That will help us achieve our linguistic policy objectives and give francophones in Quebec and in the rest of the country a tool and yet another ally when they need to advocate for their linguistic rights.

None of these efforts to bring about a course correction for the French language take anything away from the federal government's constitutional obligation to defend the rights of linguistic minorities, including the rights of Quebec's anglophone minority.

Our government will continue to stand by them by providing them with tools to defend their rights, such as the court challenges program, which we are proposing to strengthen in the bill.

● (1605)

[English]

In short, with our bill, our goal is to bring the Official Languages Act into the 21st century. It will reflect the language realities of all in Canada and provide our children with a world of possibilities.

[Translation]

In closing, it is clear that we have a common goal to want to strengthen and protect French in Quebec and across the country, and that we also recognize that French is the official language of Quebec. At the same time, we will continue to uphold constitutional protections for official language minority communities, including in Quebec.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about French as an official language. However, there is one important thing: Does she recognize that French must be the only official and common language in Quebec in order to integrate and include newcomers?

Will the federal government continue to promote institutional bilingualism, which runs directly counter to the concept of French as a common and official language? We know that the concept of "language of choice" does not work: When a francophone worker wants to work in French and an anglophone worker wants to work in English, it does not work, so there must be a common language.

I have one last question on positive measures. Since the minister said that the Liberals wanted to defend French in Quebec, should there be positive measures for French, particularly in the enhancement of official languages program and the development of official-language communities program?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

As I mentioned, it goes without saying that we want to further protect and promote French in Quebec and across the country because we want to achieve real equality for our two official languages.

The federal government has its official languages policy. There is the Official Languages Act. There will also be a new official languages act if the opposition parties support it, which I hope they will. The Constitution states that there are two official languages in the country within the federal state.

We will continue to respect the Constitution and its linguistic obligations, in particular section 133 of the Constitution Act, 1867. This section sets out rights for anglophones in Quebec. Naturally, our services will be provided in both official languages across the country, including in Quebec. We will continue to work with the Government of Quebec to ensure that francophone Quebecers can live in French and work in French. Accordingly, we have introduced a bill that establishes new obligations concerning the respect for the right to work in French and consumers' right to be served in French. A francophone working in a federally regulated business must not face discrimination.

My colleague often asks me—

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The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her support for building the new La Ronde cultural centre in Timmins. It is very important for our region. The francophone community in northern Ontario is dynamic and very proud.

My concern has to do with the cultural organizations that have been affected by the pandemic. More specifically, my concern has to do with the fundraising in connection with certain events.

My question is the following: Is the government prepared to work with the francophone organizations in northern Ontario after the pandemic to ensure the successful development of francophone culture in the northern region of Ontario?

• (1610)

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I can assure my colleague that I will be pleased to work with him and the organizations in northern Ontario. These organizations ensure that the francophone community is strong and vital and can continue to develop.

During the pandemic, we provided different support measures including the wage subsidy. We provided help to the cultural sector. We also want to be there during the recovery. Of course the bill I introduced today recognizes that, for a community to be strong it needs to have strong institutions. The federal government has a new obligation, to support minority language communities, including francophones in northern Ontario. We will be sure to work together in order to fulfill this obligation.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government took six years to introduce the bill to modernize the Official Languages Act and, in my view, has taken very little action to protect French. A lot of parents and students in British Columbia want to get into bilingual schools, however, they do not have the resources or the funding. More to the point, the province does not have enough resources and funding to support the schools and expand them.

Will the federal government provide additional dollars to the province to expand bilingual and French schools in British Columbia so we can enhance and protect the French language?

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, I had the chance to talk with my counterpart in British Columbia last week. We got along very well and were both in favour of supporting even more francophones across the province, who are fighting for access to better public education systems across the beautiful province of British Columbia.

That being said, we did increase support to British Columbia for French teachers' recruitment and retention. We also increased funding for francophone school boards and increased the transfers to the provinces. There is also more money in the budget to support provinces and territories for French immersion schools.

We know that parents across the country, including in British Columbia, cannot wait for their children to have access to French immersion, so we will get rid of wait lists.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages (FedDev Ontario and Official Languages), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the motion moved by the member for Beauce—Chambly.

I am pleased to pick up where the minister left off in talking about the reform of the Official Languages Act. I want to start by highlighting how important it is to build upon Canada's official languages in this process.

We know that our two official languages, French and English, are inextricably linked to our history and our identity. They are used in all of our conversations, activities and projects. They also help us express our culture, which is made up of and enriched by many different cultures. All of these cultures are at the very heart of the social contract that binds us all as Canadians.

French and English, along with the indigenous languages, enrich this country so much and inspired Parliament to adopt the first version of the Official Languages Act in 1969.

Since the passage of this act, various measures and amendments have allowed us to strengthen both the official languages framework and the measures defining their use in the public service. Of course, the most important contribution to official languages is without question their entrenchment in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The Official Languages Act and other linguistic measures, including the court challenges program and the language rights support program, paved the way for incredible gains.

Among other things, we have seen the establishment of institutional bilingualism, enabling francophones across the country to access services in their mother tongue. We have also seen the emergence of a new generation of Canadians who were able to get an education in the minority official language, something their parents were unable to do. We have seen members of official language minority communities assert their rights and support the development and vitality of their community.

Many civil servants were able to learn the other official language in order to support the delivery of adapted services, while measures were taken to allow francophones and anglophones to find a job and advance their career in federal institutions.

Back when the act was passed, who would have thought French immersion schools would be so popular?

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The whole country can see how far we have come, but the situation has changed rapidly in recent years. We have observed that, despite our efforts, the use of French has declined across Canada. Because of its minority status in North America, we have always had to be vigilant and focused. Over the past few years, the Internet and social media have become pervasive, international trade has advanced and every aspect of our lives has been digitized. All these factors unduly favour the use of English.

It is time to take action. This new reality has created an array of needs and expectations, as well as new responsibilities for us. A responsible government must study the situation, review its positions, develop solutions and consult Canadians about the best approach. That is exactly what we did.

In February, our efforts to that end resulted in the publication of our reform proposal, entitled “English and French: Towards a substantive equality of official languages in Canada”, which the minister referred to.

In addition, this morning, after extensive efforts, the Minister of Official Languages introduced in Parliament Bill C-32, an act for the substantive equality of French and English and the strengthening of the Official Languages Act. This bill confirms the commitments made by our government in the throne speech and the 2021 budget statement. It fulfills the vision we presented in February, a vision that was favourably received by official language communities and by many community and government stakeholders.

We are convinced that, in a modern society like ours, and given our ambition to build a just society, all Canadians need to see themselves reflected in the Official Languages Act. Anglophone parents must be able to enrol their children in French immersion. The government must meet the expectations of francophones, both in Quebec and across Canada, and it must properly promote and protect the French language.

• (1615)

Francophones must have the right to work in their mother tongue everywhere in Quebec and in regions with a strong francophone presence elsewhere in the country.

Immigration is quickly changing Canada's demographics, and the government needs to attract immigrants who speak French to both Quebec and other areas. The government also needs to support official language minority communities, both anglophones in Quebec and francophones outside Quebec, so that they have strong institutions that will ensure their vitality and survival.

Finally, the federal government needs to set an example. The public service needs to offer real services in both official languages. CBC/Radio-Canada needs to play its role as a key cultural institution, the Commissioner of Official Languages must be given more powers, and finally, judges of the Supreme Court of Canada must be bilingual.

We want to establish a new linguistic balance that will ensure substantive equality between our two official languages. That will sometimes require each linguistic group to be treated differently in the development and implementation of our policies in order to take into account their specific situation, characteristics or needs.

In Canada, French and English do not carry the same weight. It is up to the government to make smart interventions to restore the balance and ensure that the fundamental rights of all Canadians are respected.

Our reform plan and our bill include several guiding principles and proposed changes that will allow us to better promote and support French, support the establishment of essential institutions in official language minority communities and finally achieve the equality between our two official languages that we have been striving for.

Among other things, we want to highlight the specific linguistic vitality of each province and territory and protect the existing language rights of indigenous peoples. We want to create more opportunities for learning both official languages. We want to support institutions in official language minority communities, and we will commit to protecting and promoting French across Canada, including in Quebec. We want the Government of Canada to set an example by enhancing compliance within federal institutions.

I would like to reiterate that the reform will also affect federally regulated private businesses and, accordingly, the linguistic situation in that part of the labour market. We will protect the right to work in French in these businesses across the country wherever there is a strong francophone presence, which obviously includes Quebec. Both workers and consumers in these regions will be better protected, better informed and served in their language.

As well, we have found that legislation dealing with a subject as dynamic and evolving as language must be regularly reviewed and adjusted in order to stay relevant. That is why we have established a system of periodic reviews of the act and its implementation. This is how we will ensure that the Official Languages Act remains relevant and modern.

We want to ensure the vitality of our two linguistic communities and of all official language minority communities. Due to the differing circumstances of each linguistic community, we are adopting broad principles and comprehensive objectives in order to avoid taking a case-by-case approach, which could create more inequality. We are certain that the solution to achieving the desired results lies in a flexible but solid pan-Canadian framework.

I believe that all members of the House care about protecting the official languages and the language rights of all Canadians. I would therefore encourage them to study our reform proposal carefully and to support the bill that we introduced this morning.

• (1620)

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, with whom I have worked on a number of diabetes-related issues, for her speech.

Now, let us talk about official languages. There is already an official languages program in place. It is called the enhancement of official languages program or positive measures for official languages. I do not remember the exact title.

However, this program provides nearly \$100 million to Quebec, not for the protection of both official languages, but for the protection of English.

Does my colleague think it is right that this program exists and that, in Quebec, only the anglophone community can receive this funding, which I am sure everyone will agree is a relatively large amount of money?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. Our government has been working hard all along to implement programs to help minority communities.

I am from Ontario, I am the member for Parliament for Orléans, and I think it is very important that the Liberal government has invested more than \$500 million so far in an action plan to support the French fact and to support and promote French.

We will continue to help francophones across Canada and in Quebec.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague and congratulate her on her speech.

We work together pretty often at the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I would like to hear her opinion on the following. The Government of Quebec is calling for the federal government to recognize that, of the two official languages, there is one minority language that is at risk, and that is French.

Even the UN's Human Rights Committee said that the anglophones in Quebec are not a minority because they are part of the English Canadian majority, which, I should point out, forced through a Constitution to weaken Quebec law and the Charter of the French Language.

What are my colleague's thoughts on that?

At the end of the day, Quebec and Quebecers represent the bulk of the francophone minority in Canada.

Does she agree that the government should recognize this and amend the Official Languages Act?

• (1625)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question. It gives me the opportunity to suggest that he carefully study Bill C-32, which recognizes that we must consider the fact that French is in a minority situation in Canada and in North America due to the predominant use of English. We hope that the Bloc Québécois will support this bill.

As the throne speech and the budget showed, we are firmly committed to protecting French across Canada and Quebec. The Constitution also makes us responsible for protecting the linguistic rights of Quebec's anglophone minority.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary said that the government recognized this in the bill, but it contains

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no measures. If French is recognized as the minority language, measures should be included to protect the French language.

What are these measures?

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, once again, I thank my colleague. Our actions speak for themselves. From the start, we created an action plan with an additional \$500 million. We tabled a budget with an additional amount of almost \$400 million to support the francophone minority and also second language training. My colleague knows very well that our government wants to protect the French fact everywhere in Canada, including in Quebec.

We have a constitutional responsibility, and we are proud of it. We will continue to demonstrate this commitment with concrete measures, like the bill introduced today.

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform you that I intend to split my time with my friend and esteemed colleague from Manicouagan, who is a very busy member.

Today, we are discussing the motion of the Bloc Québécois, and I will take the time to read it, dissect it and discuss it in detail. The choice of words it contains is not insignificant.

The first part of the motion reads as follows: "That the House agree that section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, grants Quebec and the provinces exclusive jurisdiction to amend their respective constitutions". Anyone who reads this part of the motion will notice that we are not trying to turn members of the House into constitutional apprentices the way we could turn them into apprentice witches. We are simply asking the House to note and to recognize the existence of a section of the Constitution Act that Quebec and the provinces can use.

It is interesting to discuss this today because we have been seeing all day that many members have tried to act like constitutional apprentices. Some have already found problems and flaws and have already tried to figure out how they could attack Quebec's desire to use this section.

Rather than welcoming this, these people are already raising issues related to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the protection of the anglophone minority, whereas the motion does not deal with those matters. These people are already raising questions about the interpretation of the Constitution and whether there is a symbolic aspect. Right off the bat, these people are already trying to undo something that has not even been enacted by the Quebec National Assembly. I think this speaks volumes about the status of French, the recognition of Quebec as a nation and the recognition of its autonomy and potential independence.

The second part of the motion asks that the House "acknowledge the will of Quebec to enshrine in its constitution that Quebecers form a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that it is also the common language of the Quebec nation".

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Again, as we have said repeatedly today, this part of the motion is not seeking anyone's permission. We are not looking for authorization from the federal government, from Parliament or from the House to do something in Quebec. We are just asking the House to acknowledge what Quebec is about to do.

What does "acknowledge" mean? It means to formally take note of information for later use. Once the House has acknowledged Quebec's will, any decision to either ignore it or fight it will at least be an informed decision.

We have to ask ourselves whether the government is actually acknowledging Quebec's will if it goes ahead with an Official Languages Act reform that dismisses what Quebec wants to see with respect to language of work. Just acknowledging something means that there is a political layer to the government's response to what Quebec wants to do, not to what Quebec is asking, but to what Quebec is going to do.

We also wonder, and this has been raised on several occasions, whether including Quebec's status as a nation and designating French as the only official and common language in the Constitution will be merely symbolic.

I would be curious to see how the Prime Minister would explain why one part of the supreme law of his country, the Constitution Act, is symbolic, but not the rest. Why would what Quebec wants be merely symbolic, but not the rest of the Constitution Act?

Once the Constitution Act recognizes French as the only common and official language of Quebec, it will be interesting to see happens the next time the courts try to butcher Bill 101. This will be fascinating to follow, as will the language of work issue, since it is part of Bill 96. That bill has not passed yet, but I think it will go smoothly.

● (1630)

What happens if Quebec passes this bill, the Minister of Official Languages' watered-down version of protecting the right to work in French goes forward and the Constitution recognizes Quebec's official language? That will be interesting. I think it might make headlines in a few newspapers. I was shocked this morning when I read that the minister was introducing a bill said to be basically a copy of Bill 96, but by the end of the article, I realized that that is not at all the case. Protecting the right to work in French is certainly not the same thing as making French the language of work.

I find it particularly interesting that we are debating this in the House today, as we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Bloc Québécois. I think it is important to remember the Bloc Québécois's role in the House.

Journalists asked us the same question several times when we announced our intention to move a motion to recognize the will of the National Assembly to include the Quebec nation and the French language in the Constitution. We were asked if we would be recognizing the Constitution with this motion. We were told that if we used it, we would be recognizing it. The best answer to this question is to remember the importance of not taking things lying down. We cannot let Quebec be weakened by standing idly as we watch

the train go by. This would not be in Quebec's interest. It is better to fight with the tools at hand.

At times, some members badger us about whether we are trying to make Quebec work as part of the rest of Canada. In my view, we are instead preparing Quebec for what is to come. We are ensuring that Quebec will be in the best possible position when it collectively decides to make its own decision about its future.

Speaking of the Bloc Québécois' 30th anniversary, I want to share a quote from someone who spent a little time in the party: "The politics of the worst-case scenario are the worst kind of politics." We are not seeing calls to recognize the Constitution; I would say that we are instead seeing an unbridled show of nationalism that is cause for celebration. I am so happy to see Quebec taking a more coordinated approach to protecting the French language.

The movement to promote French is gaining ground, at a time when this is more imperative than ever. This is urgent, and I spoke about this in the House last week. A trend is starting to appear, and we need to reverse it.

The percentage of Quebecers who speak French as a first language has dropped below 80% for the first time in more than a century, and the Office québécois de la langue française estimates that this figure could drop below 70% by 2036.

We have also noticed that young francophones tend to become anglicized. The number of people between the ages of 25 and 44 in the greater Montreal area has doubled over the past 15 years. A trend has also been observed in Quebec: Only 55% of allophones in Quebec make a language transfer to French. However, to maintain our relative weight, 90% of allophones in Quebec would have to make the transfer to French.

It is therefore imperative and urgent that something be done. We need to protect French. I think that it is good to talk about the positive aspects of strengthening and promoting French. We should not just talk about it from the perspective of the inevitable erosion of French. We need to remember that French is also a common language for newcomers so that they can share their culture and who they are with us and we can live together in a society where everyone has their place. I see it in my riding. Recent surveys carried out in Saint-Jean showed that residents want to welcome more and more newcomers. French enables us to communicate and share with them effectively.

I would like to briefly come back to the matter of the Bloc Québécois's role. With regard to this motion, the Bloc Québécois's role is simply to ensure that Quebec is the one that decides how it wants to write its language laws. That is the Bloc Québécois's role, and that is what the Bloc Québécois has been doing for the past 30 years.

On that note, I want to take this opportunity to wish our party a happy 30th anniversary. However, I must say that I am sure we will not be here for another 30 years, or at least I hope not.

• (1635)

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech. It is always a pleasure to listen to her speak about Quebec and the Quebec nation.

What a coincidence that the Minister of Official Languages chose today to table her bill to modernize the Official Languages Act. In my view, it is not enough. Much attention is given to bilingualism, but not necessarily to the French language. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, some people would say that coincidences do not really exist. Today, I am strangely inclined to believe they do.

As for the protection of bilingualism, I have taken the liberty of making up a new word to describe the type of bilingualism that could be created by the reform of the Official Languages Act. It would “aircanadize” federal institutions. As I mentioned several times, bilingualism is alive and well in Quebec, but French is not. It is French that must be defended, not bilingualism.

However, that is not what is in the reform. That is why it is important for the Bloc Québécois to go a little bit further and to promote and defend what Quebec wants.

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

Today's motion has no legal effect. It simply asks the House to agree and acknowledge that Quebec has the right to amend its constitution. Does my colleague know why some members of the House are afraid to vote for this motion?

• (1640)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not presume to know what is going on in the heads of all 338 members. I think that would be really tiring, and I would be exhausted at the end of the day, so I will not speak on their behalf.

What I do know is that, even though the motion is not binding, as it merely states an established fact and says what Quebec is doing, people find it upsetting. That reason alone is why we needed to talk about it and, most importantly, why we need to vote on it. I have learned a lot about what Quebec's place in a united Canada looks like to some of my colleagues and about how important they think it is to protect and promote the French fact.

[English]

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Official Languages tabled a bill this morning. Does it help out with the motion the Bloc is putting through today, or is it far from what they are actually requesting?

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I heard my colleague's question, but I will do my best to answer.

If the member is asking me whether the Official Languages Act reform introduced today is consistent with our motion, the answer is no, not at all. For weeks now, we have been hearing that the reform will just “aircanadize” federal institutions and protect bilin-

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gualism, not ensure that Quebec's common and official language is French. That is what we have been debating for weeks.

If I ever see that in the bill, I will be thrilled, but I do not see that happening anytime soon. We also have to make it to a vote on the bill, and that is another problem.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I almost feel like singing my question. I thank my colleague for her eloquence and relevant comments. She is highly competent and we always appreciate her input and speeches.

As this question period draws to an end, I would ask my colleague if she believes the minister's reform package constitutes a road map for Quebec's survival. That is what the minister seems to be saying. I would like to know if this type of reform gives my colleague any hope for the future of Quebec.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. To paraphrase the premier of Quebec, we end up chatting so much that it feels as though we are having our own little party over here.

Naturally, I do not believe the bill has enough teeth to really ensure the protection of French; what it seeks to protect is bilingualism. Protecting bilingualism means protecting English. People need to know this; indeed, it cannot be said enough.

I am flabbergasted when, on the issue of protecting French in Quebec, the first reaction we hear from the House is about how we need to offer equal protection to anglophone minorities. The fact is that these minorities are faring quite well in Quebec. At the risk of repeating what my leader said this morning, I will be happy when the day comes where francophones outside of Quebec enjoy the same protections as those afforded to our minority anglophone population, which, it needs to be said, we cherish, and which enjoys a certain degree of status and protection under our domestic legislation.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I am pleased to speak today on this Bloc Québécois opposition day, and I really mean that. Often, we say we are pleased out of habit. Despite the fact that the government tried to reduce the scope of this day, as we saw during question period, the fact remains that this is an historic moment.

It is an historic moment for the Bloc Québécois. It is our 30th anniversary. My colleague from Saint-Jean mentioned it earlier, but every time we rise to speak we are taking our rightful place and we must always defend ourselves. I am paraphrasing what she said a bit, but it is truly a pleasure to do so. I am speaking under the theme of freedom, uniqueness, sovereignty, identity, dignity and legitimacy. It is pretty clear that I am pleased to speak.

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As the Prime Minister said, as soon as Bill 96 was tabled at the Quebec National Assembly, he promptly mentioned that it was only symbolic. Given everything I said in my introduction, the bill is far from being symbolic. It is an action. I will come back later to the issue of “acknowledging”. It is a really strong action and, beyond the symbol, there are meanings and impacts. It is not only words and sounds, but concrete actions which are part of the matter and the material.

Let us simply recall the intent of the motion, which we are told is trivial. I heard the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons earlier as he was telling us that everything is already in place. I absolutely disagree with that. The Bloc Québécois motion contains three elements and states the following:

That the House agree that section 45 of the Constitution Act, 1982, grants Quebec and the provinces exclusive jurisdiction to amend their respective constitutions and acknowledge the will of Quebec to enshrine in its constitution that Quebecers form a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that it is also the common language of the Quebec nation.

I was saying that, for me, this is a concrete step that rests on a solid foundation; it is almost primal. Some said that this was an empty gesture, an exercise in futility. The fact is, however, that acknowledging something is not a passive act. We are not asking the government, the House of Commons and all our colleagues to sit back and do nothing while the train goes by; we are asking them to act. To acknowledge something is to take action. Acknowledging something is an act of will. There is no will to be found in passivity. In order to acknowledge something, one needs to want to do it. Sometimes, people are motivated by interests that I dare not name, but at the very least, they need to make their will known.

One also needs to be willing to admit certain things. Admissions require humility. We are confronted with something that is bigger than us. It is quite simply undeniable. We are also humbled by what we are seeing, because we are powerless to stop it. I will come back to this question of “stopping” it, because to “admit” something should not necessarily mean to “oppose” something. It is not enough to simply observe; we need to see, to understand, to hear, and also to engage, which is a strong word.

What we are asking the House to do today, to acknowledge something, is a powerful thing. The government has never done this before, despite what the government House leader would have us believe.

• (1645)

This acknowledgement also implies a certain duration. A commitment is not simply fulfilled when one votes in favour or against our motion after a couple of days or hours of debate. This is a commitment one takes today for the future. I am urging all members in this house to engage in and not oppose this process.

I am urging members to acknowledge that Quebec is a nation, that French is the only official language of Quebec and that French is the common language of the Quebec nation. Think about what the word “acknowledge” means. I spoke about the primal and concrete aspects of the word, about commitment, humility, admissions and lack of passivity. This motion is very charged. It speaks to our identity, to the very existence of Quebecers. We are calling on the

House to recognize and commit to allowing us to simply be, exist and become.

I have heard some comments that made me think. The Prime Minister said that there was absolutely nothing there, that it would pass and that the motion was unnecessary.

I would like to take a moment to quote a few extracts from anglophone media, be they in Quebec, such as the *Montreal Gazette*, or elsewhere in Canada, such as the *Toronto Sun*. What seems to be self-evident for the government, at least according to the comments made in the last few weeks, is not resolved at all in my view.

The government and members of the House will need courage to be able to admit that and to acknowledge what the Bloc Québécois motion says.

I will now quote some extracts in English. I could translate them, but I think they will be clear for the majority of members in the House. Today is June 15. Not so long ago, on June 10, the *Montreal Gazette* said the following:

• (1650)

[English]

“Why does the protection of the French language require the blanket suspension of human rights?”

[Translation]

The *Montreal Gazette* is telling us that human rights are being suspended. I do not know if the author meant that as a hyperbole or another stylistic device. On my part, I do not see any consensus in there, but rather a potential controversy. The following words are from Ms. Jennings, from the Quebec Community Groups Network. She said:

[English]

“It’s a bad way to start as a nation”.

[Translation]

According to her, Bill 96 is a bad way to start a nation. I am sorry to break the news to Ms. Jennings, but the Quebec nation already existed a long time ago. Here is another quote from the newspapers:

[English]

“Why does protecting the French language require the blanket... [and] the most sweeping overrides of human rights ever seen in Canada.”

[Translation]

That is a gross exaggeration. This is not the worst denial or claw-back of human rights that ever took place in Canada. Now I will quote from the *Toronto Sun*, which is not from Quebec but from one of Canada's biggest cities, the Queen City. A former advisor or assistant to Jean Chrétien wrote:

[English]

The story is about the Canadian province of Quebec, and the changes that are coming in the Quebec government's recently-tabled Bill 96. The Bill would change the Constitution of Canada, and render Quebec a “nation.” The Bill will impose the changes described above to “protect” the French language, too....

It will actually ruin lives in Quebec — and radically change Canada in the process.

[*Translation*]

The author says that passing Bill 96 will ruin lives in Quebec.

I have thousands of quotes like that one. To me, “acknowledgement” is really an engagement that calls for firm, brave and courageous determination on the part of the government and MPs. I hope they will keep that in mind when it is time to vote.

Just for fun, I will conclude with some words by Loco Locass, whom I never thought I would quote in the House. I believe music is the best way to talk about languages, about our openness, about our past and our future. Is there any better way to show how open we are? My colleague from Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix would agree. Can anything convey who we are better than poetry? We are open, but we are also a francophone nation.

...we are creators
Not creatures, not caricatures
Our home has no separations; it has four seasons
We are used to the climate and the ice fog doesn't faze us
We have travelled along the arteries of a massive continent
Our species aspires to space, and we've left our mark everywhere
...In stumple fields in the moonlight
And the roots of a beech that can no longer bend

We will not bend.

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. I especially appreciated how she ended it. I have to say that I listen a lot to Loco Locass these days. As the national holiday approaches, I am immersing myself in our Quebec folklore.

With respect to the bill on modernizing the Official Languages Act that was introduced today, the Government of Quebec clearly said that no interpretation of the Official Languages Act can as a result undermine the use of French as the common language of Quebec, indicating that there is a right to live and to work in French in Quebec and that in the event of a difference between the Official Languages Act and the Charter of the French Language, the latter takes precedence.

Today, I heard the Minister of Official Languages say that she would not have the Charter of the French Language take precedence. According to my colleague, why is that?

• (1655)

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia for her question.

The cryptic reasons why the Minister of Official Languages has decided to have her bill take precedence over the Charter of the French Language are only known to her. However, I could make an educated guess.

I believe that she just does not want to let Quebec decide what is best for Quebec. It comes down to the speech that we heard earlier and what we will see tomorrow when there will be a vote on our bill. We hope it will pass because it better protects not Quebecers' right to work in French, but everyone's duty to work in French.

Business of Supply

The same goes for the motion we moved today. We are going much further than the minister. We are saying once more that Quebec must decide. I simply believe that the minister does not want Quebec to decide.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in her speech, earlier, my colleague spoke about the opposition across the aisle. Today, the government introduced its long-awaited official languages bill. We have wanted to reform the Official Languages Act for such a long time. The bill was introduced at the very end of the parliamentary session, on the eve of an election campaign.

Does my colleague believe this to be a coincidence or a very clumsy political stunt on the part of her opposition, which just happens to be the government?

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable. Indeed, officially, we have the same opposition.

I hope that it is not a stunt. If it is, in my opinion, it was not in the least bit subtle, because we saw it coming a mile away.

This sounds like some kind of sluggish declaration on the eve of an election. They are trying to prove that they did something and that they were really serious. Earlier, during Oral Questions, the minister said that her government had been working on it for six years.

I am always amazed to see that someone could wait six years before introducing a bill that they had worked hard on and in which they believe, and to see them introduce it at the last moment, just under the bell. In my opinion, it is very clumsy, and I agree with my colleague.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am a very proud Canadian, and part of that is recognizing that we are a bilingual nation with a very high sense of pride. French is a common language in the province of Quebec, and outside of Quebec many communities strive to become more bilingual so that French is spoken more and more. It is such a beautiful language.

Given that the government has already recognized that Quebecers form a nation within a united Canada, and given that we have already been provided assurances from Quebec that it will continue to respect its constitutional obligations to the English-speaking minority population in Quebec, why would the Bloc not support the amendment that was proposed for the purpose of clarity by the member for Mount Royal?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Mr. Speaker, I have nothing against the fact that the member for Winnipeg North is proud to be Canadian. I am also proud to be a Quebecer. Of course that will never go far enough for me. It cannot go far enough since I am a separatist MP. What I want is to decide for myself, decide with Quebec and for Quebec.

Business of Supply

If the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House had listened earlier to what my colleague from Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia was saying, he would have seen that she was quoting the Premier of Quebec, François Legault. He himself said that the legislation was inadequate. I am not the only one to say so. All of Quebec is saying so through its premier.

• (1700)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Laurent is rising on a question of privilege.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

GOVERNMENT'S ALLEGED NON-COMPLIANCE WITH AN ORDER OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, indeed, I am rising on a question of privilege.

I would like to briefly respond to yesterday's intervention by the member for Kingston and the Islands. His intervention was in response to the question of privilege I raised in the House on June 7, which made reference to the fact that the Public Health Agency of Canada did not comply with the order of the House of June 2 to turn over critical documents in a case that every Canadian is interested in, that of the laboratory in Winnipeg.

We have a number of important elements to address. First, the member cited page 986 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, concerning the three options that a committee has when a person or organization does not turn over documents.

The comments by the member for Kingston and the Islands were interesting. The problem is that he read the first and second option, but not the third.

[English]

Let me complete the citation by adding the third option. "The third option is to reject the reasons given for denying access to the record and uphold the order to produce the entire record."

Second, the member claimed that security safeguards are "nowhere to be found" in my proposed privilege motion. This is simply not true. He based his argument on the motion that I offered to the House last week and not on the draft motion.

As you know, page 145 of Bosc and Gagnon states that a member raising a question of privilege should provide, as part of the written notice to you, the text of the motion that is proposed to be moved. The draft motion, which was attached to the notice I provided to you last week, refers in part to the health minister "delivering up the documents ordered by this House on June 2, 2021, so that they may be deposited with the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel under the terms of that order."

In any event, whether the House may demand redacted or unredacted documents, with or without security precautions, is something for the House to determine and is not a procedural prerequisite. Regardless, this is obviously a red herring from the Liberals because they have shown no interest to date, in response to three different orders with security safeguards, in producing these documents.

Finally, the member has called upon you to exercise your authority under page 150 of Bosc and Gagnon in such a way to allow me to put forward one of two motions: either hold the government in contempt or refer the matter to the procedure and House affairs committee. Of course, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands overlooks, for example, the 1891 case of Michael Connolly, recounted at page 121 of Bosc and Gagnon, which I discussed with you last week. In brief, the House ordered Mr. Connolly to the bar of the House when he had refused to turn over documents that the committee required.

[Translation]

Reading between the lines, it appears quite clearly that the Liberal government is trying to say that the House simply does not have the authority to consider a motion that could enable it to obtain information that it ordered the government to produce, when the government is refusing to do so.

In fact, if we accept this view of things, as the member for Kingston and the Islands had proposed, that logic invariably leads to this situation. The government declares that it has a veto on the tabling and publication of all documents.

[English]

Under the member's proposed arrangement, he could choose to comply to have yet another committee discuss their intransigence or to be found in contempt. Nowhere among the options that the government contemplates would the House actually get the documents it ordered.

To allow that would be to allow the government to frustrate the objectives of the House in securing the information it requires to discharge its constitutional responsibility of holding the government to account. To allow the government's claim to succeed would not, in my respectful opinion, be consistent with your duties as the guardian of the House's rights and privileges.

• (1705)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent for his additional comments on this question of privilege. For the moment, there is still a 10-minute period left.

The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—AMENDMENT TO SECTION 45 OF THE CONSTITUTION AND QUEBEC, A FRENCH-SPEAKING NATION

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, without getting into the finer details, I will say that I preferred to use up my time rather than that of other parliamentarians.

Indeed, the debate we were invited to take part in today on the motion moved by the Bloc Québécois deserves to be appreciated in all its splendour and all its legitimacy. That is why, as a Quebec member and as a Canadian member in the House of Commons, I am proud to participate in this debate and to support this proposal.

What does this proposal, which contains three elements, say?

First, it says that Quebec and all the provinces can, if they so desire, amend their constitutions, which are enshrined in the Canadian Constitution. Second, it recognizes that Quebec is a nation. Third, it recognizes that French is the official language of Quebec.

I may not go as far as to say that it is a truism, but it is almost one. In fact, the three elements raised in this motion are facts that, constitutionally, historically and factually, are indisputable. Let us examine them one by one.

Let us start with the French fact in Quebec. If, after travelling across North America, a person comes to Quebec, they will obviously notice a difference right away: the French fact. That has been the reality in that part of the world since 1534, when Jacques Cartier was the first European colonist to set foot in what is now known as Quebec. A more permanent settlement was then built under the leadership of Champlain in 1608. After founding Quebec on July 3, 1608, Champlain ensured that it was the first permanent, fixed settlement of European conquerors on this land, which had been occupied by the first nations since the beginning of time.

That brings me to this: the French language has been the official language of Quebec since 1974. Quebec has had French as its only official language for nearly 50 years. Attempts were made before that.

French was always at the heart of Premier Maurice Duplessis's proud, enthusiastic and very hands-on defence of French, but there was no question of enshrining in law the fact that French was the language of Quebec at that time. It took Bill 63, which was introduced by Minister Jean-Guy Cardinal in 1963, under Premier Jean-Jacques Bertrand's Union Nationale government, for that to happen. That bill gave people the choice between receiving an education in French or in English. In a way, one could say that Bill 63 made French and English the languages of Quebec. It took many social events to get Robert Bourassa's government to pass what is referred to as Bill 22 in 1974.

It always makes me laugh because some historians and people who lived through that era often talk about Bill 22, Bill 63 and Bill 101, using the English word "bill" when talking about protecting the French language. It always makes me smile when I hear the impassioned speeches of people like Pierre Bourgault where they talk about "Bill" 22 and "Bill" 63. I would like to remind all proud separatists that "bill" is an English word and that it would be better to use the French term "loi" or "projet de loi".

Bill 22, passed by the very federalist and very Liberal Robert Bourassa, has cemented French as the official language of Quebec for almost 50 years now. Then, in 1977, Bill 101 was passed by René Lévesque's PQ government. Naturally, this legislation went a lot further. It had quite an impact, in fact, even back then. Historians all agree on this. Premier Lévesque believed, and all the biographies can confirm this, that Bill 101 went way too far in certain re-

gards. The fact remains, however, that history tells us that French has been the official language since 1974.

The motion states that French is the official language of Quebec, and that has been the case since 1974. We are not saying anything new.

The motion also states that Quebec forms a nation. I have the pleasure and the great privilege of bringing back fond memories for the House. On November 22, 2006, the House passed a motion stating that Quebec formed a nation within a united Canada.

• (1710)

Who first got the idea of Quebec being a nation? It was the Right Hon. Stephen Harper, head of the Canadian government, leader of the Conservative Party. We, Conservatives, are the ones who recognized Quebec as a nation. I did not have the privilege, honour and dignity of sitting here at the time, as I was still a journalist, just like some of my other colleagues in fact. I do not dare name them since they are in the House as I speak and I can never manage to remember the name of their ridings.

[English]

The member for Thornhill had a very respectful career as a journalist.

[Translation]

When I was a journalist back in 2006, I remember meeting former prime minister Harper when he was at the Quebec National Assembly in May 2006. I asked him whether Quebec formed a nation and he gave me a vague answer. Not long after, on June 23, he hosted a cabinet meeting in Quebec City and I asked him the same question. Once again, he gave a vague answer. However, on November 22, 2006, he gave a clear answer right here in the House: Quebec forms a nation. It was Stephen Harper's Conservative government that recognized Quebec as a nation. This is nothing new.

Since the facts are undeniable and the whole story is worthy of being told, I also want to remind members that on October 30, 2003, the Quebec National Assembly, led by Liberal premier and proud federalist Jean Charest, adopted a motion stating that Quebec formed a nation.

The third part of the motion has to do with the provinces having the ability to amend their constitutions. This has been true since 1867. When four provinces joined together to create Canada, this provision was included in the British North America Act. It gave the four founding provinces and the provinces that later joined the right to amend their constitutions, within the Canadian constitution, on matters that affect them directly.

This provision was reaffirmed in the Constitution Act, 1982. All of the provinces, including Quebec, Alberta, British Columbia, Newfoundland, Manitoba and so on, who wished to do so had the right to amend their constitutions. Almost all provinces have made use of this provision, Alberta being the most recent case.

The Bloc Québécois's motion contains three parts that are factually indisputable.

Business of Supply

[English]

This is why I strongly support this motion. First of all, it provides that each province has the right to amend its own constitution: all provinces, not only Quebec, but Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Each and every province of this country has the ability to amend its own constitution.

Quebec has been a French province since 1974. It is not brand new. It is the truth and the reality. It has been a historic fact for almost half a century, so there is nothing new there.

Quebec is a nation in the House of Commons. Under the former Conservative government of the Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper, we recognized here in the House of Commons, with a strong majority vote, that Quebec is a nation. For sure, there are some people who have some concerns with that but who would think that Stephen Harper was not also a proud Canadian? It is because we are such proud Canadians that we shall respect each and every province and we shall respect the will of the provinces as long as they address their own jurisdictions, which is exactly the case in that statement.

The law in the Constitution has provided that Quebec's official language should be French for almost half a century. Also, Quebec as a nation was recognized 15 years ago by a Conservative government. That is why I will proudly support this motion.

• (1715)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 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.

As usual, if a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

The hon. member for Saint-Jean.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Speaker, I doubt anyone will be shocked to learn that we intend to request a recorded division.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, June 16, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:30 so that we can start Private Members' Business.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

[For continuation of proceedings, see part B]

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

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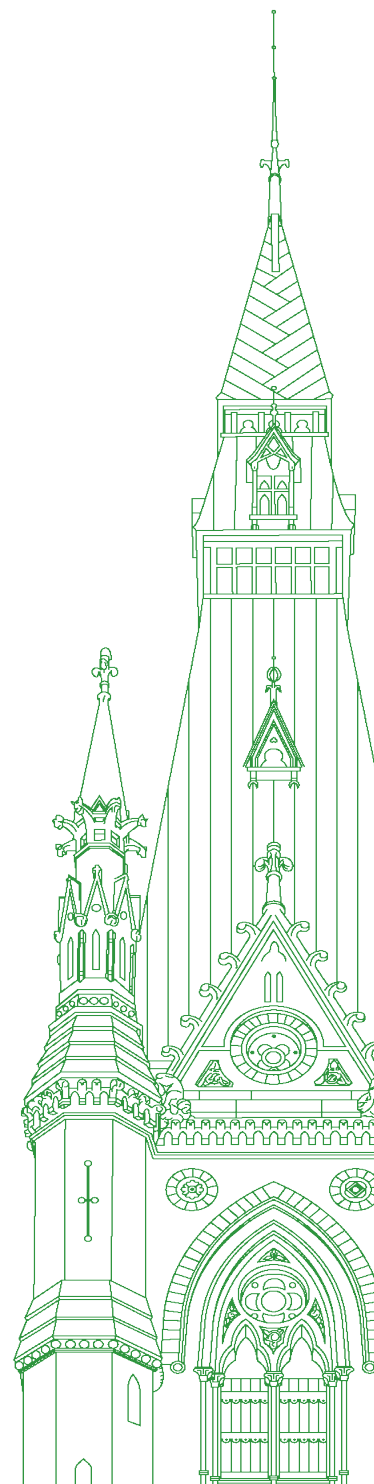
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Official Report
(Hansard)

Volume 150 No. 118
(Part B)

Tuesday, June 15, 2021

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, June 15, 2021

[Continuation of proceedings from part A]

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

FEDERAL DENTAL CARE PLAN

The House resumed from May 4 consideration of the motion.

The Deputy Speaker: When the House last took up debate on the question, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands had eight minutes and 20 seconds remaining in his time for his comments on the motion, and we will go to him now.

The hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

• (1715)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank all members in the House for allowing us to see the clock forward. It is quite fascinating that one of the things we can agree so well on is moving time into the future.

Nonetheless, I am honoured to rise today, again, to continue my discussion on Motion No. 62, the motion for a federal dental care plan. I certainly admire the initiative that has been brought forward by the member for St. John's East. We need to have these discussions about dental care and how it will be introduced if that is what Canadians want to see. I personally believe Canadians do want to see their pharmacare, medicines as well as dental care included under our general health care system.

The motion is very simple. It calls on the federal government, with a single passing, to somehow, with very little consideration as to how it would be done, develop this plan for any household that has an average income of \$90,000 or less per year to automatically start getting dental care. The challenging part with this is that, for starters, our health care system and, by extension, dental care, is one of these areas of our Constitution where we have to work with provincial counterparts. We have to come to some sort of joint compromise as to how that system would work.

Albeit I was not there at the time when Tommy Douglas from the NDP fought so hard for the health care system, but during a minority Parliament, health care was brought into Canada. I imagine that it happened through a lot more than a motion with one or two sentences directing the government to do it. Discussions have to take place. Compromises have to be made. Considerations have to be made.

For starters, what kind of money is already being spent through insurance companies? What is already covered by various different departments in different levels of government? How will we treat other insurance programs?

That is why I think it is important to also mention that when look at all of this, we need a proper study to assess where the country is among all the various different parts that play a role in dental care, some at the expense of the individuals receiving the care through insurance programs, but also some through federal programs, federal employees, military, inmates and, on the provincial side, through Ontario Works. How are all these things happening? In Ontario, it is through Ontario Works, but then there are all the different systems within the different provinces throughout the country.

That is why we need a full study into this, to look at the details of it before we make a recommendation back to the government on what it needs to do exactly when it comes to developing the system. I was happy to see that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health, back in February 2020, agreed to do a study on dental care specifically.

In October 2020, about eight months ago, the Parliamentary Budget Officer published a cost estimate report for federal dental care for uninsured Canadians who fell below that \$90,000 a year family income threshold. Some numbers that have been put together by the Parliamentary Budget Office, which are important, are that the program would cost roughly \$11 billion over five years, with an additional \$3 billion to set up the program, plus ongoing programming costs of around \$1.5 billion annually through to 2024-25. The program is estimated to benefit close to 6.5 million Canadians in the first year and then decrease to 6.3 million in 2025 due to changes in population and labour market conditions, etc.

• (1720)

My point is that there is a lot to be considered such as how a program of this nature will impact Canadians and what the costs will be. I do not want to diminish the quality of the work, but the limited research that the Parliamentary Budget Officer did on this topic indicates that there are some pretty significant numbers here. When we start to talk about variables in programs, when these are large programs, any one of these variables could start to skew things very quickly.

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Quite frankly, I do not think it is the kind of thing we want to mess up. It is not the kind of thing that we just want to give it a shot, see how it goes and if it does not work, then we will start to make changes. Quite frankly, the cynical side of me thinks that those who would be opposed to a system like this would use those failures as an opportunity to say that it does not work and the program needs to be scrapped.

This reminds me of pharmacare and the work that has been done to advance that throughout the country, having discussions about it or even basic income. These programs are great but they really need to have the studies done on them, to have the data collected, to have pilot projects run, so we can make well-informed decisions when advancing these objectives.

I had indicated some of the places where the federal government already did provide funding for dental care. I mentioned the Canadian Armed Forces, inmates, some veterans, certain refugee claimants who are approved for dental care, first nations and Inuit who receive dental coverage when they do not get it through other programs, and federal public servants.

More important, the Canada health transfer currently is \$41.9 billion a year to the provinces and territories, at least it was in 2020-21. Some provinces might use some of that money toward dental care. Ontario will use it through Ontario Works and other provinces will do different things with it. Any program we might establish might significantly impact how those provinces are running their programs already.

At the end of the day, I admire this concept. I admire the NDP members for pushing hard for pharmacare and dental care. I appreciate the work they are doing to move the needle forward, but before saying “develop a plan to be ready to be implemented”, we need to have the proper research and study done, which is exactly what the Standing Committee on Health has committed to undertaking. I look forward to seeing that information come back from the committee, so we can have a better, more holistic sense as to what the requirements and needs are based on data.

• (1725)

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak about Motion No 62, the proposal for national dental care.

All Canadians need dental care. The statistics today show that one in three Canadians lack dental insurance, so if we look at things positively, that means two thirds of Canadians have a plan. However, for that one third of Canadians who do not have a plan, this is a serious health concern. Also, one in five do not go to the dentist when they need to for financial reasons. People, even if they do have coverage, may not have full coverage for the work they need to have done on their teeth.

Definitely, when we look at dental health, we have to consider how that relates to the overall health of people. Many conditions can result from poor dental care and cause other health care issues. For example, people can have gum disease, which is a common thing if they do not have their regular cleaning and keep up on their oral hygiene. This can lead to many conditions, including cancer, kidney disease, rheumatoid arthritis, all kinds of very costly and ag-

gravating conditions. Gingivitis is another one that is a byproduct of poor dental hygiene. People have also linked poor dental hygiene to conditions like Alzheimer's. When we think about that and about the impacts, we know we need to find a way to ensure Canadians can have good dental care.

The member who spoke before me talked about the costs of this program, and that is definitely a consideration. There has been a number of estimates by the Parliamentary Budget Officer. A number of other people have looked at this as well and have put the cost somewhere just less than \$1 billion or up to \$3 billion a year, depending on what is covered. How will we pay for that? We already have a huge debt, \$1.3 trillion, and the government is looking at raising the ceiling on that to \$1.8 trillion. This means every individual in the country will have to pay \$250 every month for the next 10 years to pay for that. Let us think about that. Spouses, kids, everybody would owe \$250 a month.

Interestingly enough, if we think about dental care, I used to be a contractor and worked for a company with which I did not have a plan. For \$100 a month, I could get a plan that had dental care, pharmacare, health coverage, all that kind of stuff. If we were not racking up such debt in the country, which will cost the equivalent of \$250 a month per person, people could afford to get their own plans and choose what they want.

The concern I have with these national plans when they come forward is that, first, Quebec will always say that it has its own plan, that it is a provincial jurisdiction and that it does not want to participate. Therefore, we really never have a national plan. Then we have situations where some provinces already have some types of coverage. I mentioned that the two thirds of people actually have a plan. Then we come to the part of it that is the federal jurisdiction, which is the indigenous people. Therefore, we would end up with a patchwork at the end of the day. That really is not a nationwide program.

When we look at some of the services the government provides, such as the CRA and immigration, the level of service is not pleasing to Canadians. They are having to wait hours and hours, calling in multiple times, to speak to people who are not always polite to them and at the end of the day, they wait years and years for results. When it comes to dental care, we certainly would not want to that. Therefore, in addition to feeling that the jurisdiction of this whole situation is provincial, the execution of these kinds of things is also not the expertise of the federal government.

The affordability issue for Canadians is really what is keeping many people from having good dental care. Wages are not going up the way the cost of everything else is going up. We have a lot of inflation. The cost of housing is huge. We have a crisis in the country where even in my riding, which is a smaller urban-rural mix, the cheapest house that one can get is \$1,000 a month. It becoming unaffordable. If we think about Toronto, Vancouver and the big cities, people's dream of buying a house is gone. They cannot afford to pay the price.

● (1730)

We think about this pandemic and the costs that have escalated through the pandemic, like the cost of groceries and gasoline. The government has had two carbon tax increases in the middle of a pandemic, and a CPP increase at the same time. All of these things are taking money out of people's pockets.

If we talk about the \$100 people would need to buy a plan that would get them pharmacare, dental care or health care, we see the amount of burden that the government is putting on them by these taxes. As I mentioned, that is part of the problem of affordability.

I hate to do a rabbit trail here on the Line 5 issue, but this is where issues like Line 5 become very important. People do not always make the link with why that is important to them. A lot of people have called my office on this issue and have asked why they should care about that. It is a pipeline and they want to shut it down.

I ask them if they live in Ontario or Quebec and if they buy gasoline for their car. If they do, the cost of that will go up significantly if Line 5 goes down. Do they have a barbecue? Does it have a propane tank? That is where propane comes from for that propane tank. Do they heat their house with fossil fuels? These are all considerations where people will see increased costs.

Do they buy food? All the farmers heat their barns. They have their greenhouses heated. They are often running their farm equipment with all these kinds of fuels. Those costs will escalate again, and then it is back to unaffordability, where people cannot get the coverage they need for the health care they really want to have.

When I was on the health committee, we did get a few different updates. I heard the member before me speak about how there is a proposal to have another study, and I think that is a good idea. It is always worthwhile to find out where the gaps are in Canada and to see if there is something the federal government can do to address that.

I also remember sitting through a report and update from the Auditor General on the state of the nation on indigenous reserves in this country, where people do not have good dental care and where it is causing health issues that cost more. The gaps have been there for a long time and have not been addressed. We should be doing the things that are in our purview, the things we could do right now.

Instead, we have situations where, and I do not know if members recall from a couple of years ago, indigenous people were being taken to court by the government over their dental bills, which makes no sense at all. The government spent more money litigating than it would have if it had just paid for the dental work, which

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would have reduced the overall cost in the health care system because of the health impacts that poor dental care will have.

At the end of the day, when I look at Motion No. 62, I know it is well intentioned. There is a need that exists in the country for that one-third of Canadians who do not have dental care and the one in five who are not going to get the dental care they need because they cannot afford it. I do not think this is the right way to go about fixing that. I think the right way to go about fixing that is to get government spending under control, quit raising taxes on people, quit reaching into their pocket at every opportunity, and return that money to them so they can have the option to get a plan that works for them.

With that in mind, I think we also have to be very careful about provincial jurisdiction. The province is supposed to execute all of the health care services. That is its purview. The federal government can help. I know the provinces need our money in health transfers. We can work together and co-operate, but it is really not for the federal government to tell the provinces how to execute. That is their jurisdiction. That is why when we hear about these national programs, we constantly see resistance, especially from Quebec, which is very particular about its jurisdiction in the area.

In summary, I am a fan of dental care. I am a fan of finding solutions to get there, but I do not think this is it. I think the answer lies in reducing the amount of money that we are taking out of taxpayers' pockets, addressing the housing crisis in this country so that housing becomes more affordable, and making sure that people have good wages and well-paying jobs. That is where I would like to see the focus.

● (1735)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to begin this speech by paying tribute to a former mayor of Rouyn-Noranda, Pierre Grandmaître. He passed away a few days ago, and his funeral will be held on June 20. Although he was mayor almost 25 years ago, we owe to Mr. Grandmaître what are possibly the best things that even today do Rouyn-Noranda proud and make it such a great place to live. There is the arrival of the Rouyn-Noranda Huskies, who are still the defending champions of the Memorial Cup for a third year in a row, thanks to COVID. There is also the great bike trail around Lake Osisko, in Rouyn-Noranda.

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I have a little story to share about Mr. Grandmaître. When I was 18, my dream was to run in the municipal election, so my dad suggested I go see his friend, Pierre Grandmaître, to talk about his experience and get some advice. Mr. Grandmaître listened to me and also asked me to join Jean-Claude Beauchemin's team and participate in all the strategic election committees. He was really a major influence on me, and he is the reason I am in the House today. Mr. Grandmaître offered me so much support and guidance. The last time I saw him was during the 2019 election. Pierre Grandmaître was also a former Conservative candidate, but he gave me his support on his way out of the polling station. I was touched, and I will cherish that memory and the memory of his smile for a long time.

Now let us turn to the motion before us.

Once again, Quebec has to defend itself, and once again, the Bloc Québécois has to defend Quebec. The Liberal government's latest budget revealed another example of federal interference in areas under Quebec's jurisdiction, especially over health, even though that falls exclusively within Quebec's jurisdiction.

Today's Motion No. 62 is yet another attempt in the House to establish a federal dental care plan. It must be understood that the Bloc Québécois is not opposed to the idea of establishing such a plan, which would improve the quality of life of many people, including the most vulnerable. What we are opposed to is any form of interference implied in that motion.

The House of Commons should acknowledge the need to respect the democratically expressed will of Quebec and reject the federal government's unfortunate tendency to interfere in the jurisdictions of the Government of Quebec.

Today, we are celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Bloc Québécois, and it is particularly odd that this motion should be proposed today, especially after the debate we had earlier.

How many times must we repeat that health care is a provincial jurisdiction? Sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution Act, 1867, very clearly define the division of powers between the federal government and provinces. Health is an exclusive jurisdiction of Quebec, with the exception of indigenous health, military hospitals, drug approval, which is the responsibility of Health Canada, and quarantine management.

If the Government of Quebec and the National Assembly ever decide that such a dental care plan is a priority and ask the federal government for funding with no strings attached in order to pay for the plan, the Bloc Québécois would support Quebec in that undertaking.

There would be one dental plan in Quebec and another for the rest of Canada. Why? Simply because Quebec knows what is good for Quebec, and our experience shows that universal programs do not work. It is like child care, where the federal government has proudly held us up as an example, just as it did with pharmacare.

What Quebec wants right now is not a federal dental plan or any other interference. It wants an increase in federal health transfers, with no strings attached. That is what Quebecers want. For 30 years now, the Bloc Québécois has respected the democratic will of

Quebeckers, and we invite the NDP and the entire House to do the same.

Let us take another look at the federal government's last budget. This budget has interference written all over it. Using a highly dubious scheme and all kinds of feel-good theatrics, the budget proposes that the federal government develop criteria and standards for health care. Quebec notes that, in this budget, the federal government wants to establish national standards for the care of seniors in long-term care facilities, national standards for mental health care, national standards for home care, national standards for women's health care and national standards for reproductive health.

Canada needs to realize that Quebec does not want these criteria and standards. It wants the wherewithal to serve its population properly. The federal government has no business telling Quebeckers how to standardize health care. Let the Quebec Ministry of Health and Quebec health experts standardize health care in Quebec.

● (1740)

Furthermore, the federal government's arrogant attitude towards Quebec is nothing new. The federal government has been highly critical of Quebec, especially with respect to the situation in long-term care homes back in March and April 2020. This criticism was misplaced but very indicative of the Prime Minister's intentions to centralize health care powers in Ottawa.

If the Liberal government wants to help Quebec improve the unfortunate situation in long-term care homes, it should step up and fulfill its responsibility to Quebeckers by restoring health transfers to 50% of spending, as set out in the initial agreements signed more than 50 years ago. At the very least, the federal government must restore health transfers to 35%, as the Bloc Québécois, the Quebec National Assembly and all of the provinces have called for.

I remind members that the last time Ottawa stepped up on health care matters and complied with the federal-provincial agreement by covering half of health care expenditures was more than 30 years ago. Now, it is using the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, a critical and unfortunate situation, as an opportunity to push its centralist policy.

At present, Ottawa is covering no more than 20% of health care costs when it should be covering 50% as set out in the initial agreements. Things are not great at Quebec hospitals, and that is also the case for the rest of Canada. That is largely the fault of the federal government, which is playing politics at the expense of the physical and mental health of Quebeckers and Canadians.

Furthermore, we cannot ignore one of the federal government's most blatant centralizing moves in recent years, its attempt to bring the financial sector under federal control by making it responsible for insurance, securities and the distribution of financial goods and services, among other things.

For many years now, the federal government's objective has been to shift regulatory operations from Quebec to Ontario. Having a single Canada-wide securities regulator is a bad idea that should not see the light of day. This is not just a jurisdictional dispute or a squabble between the federal and provincial governments, it is a battle between Bay Street and Quebec. The objective of this Canada-wide securities regulator is another example of the centralization of financial markets by the federal government. It wants Toronto to become a single Canada-wide regulator, which would be contrary to the independent economic development of all the other provinces. I remind members that the Bloc Québécois and Quebec are strongly opposed to the idea.

Four times now, the National Assembly of Quebec has unanimously called on the federal government to give it up. Everyone in Quebec is against it. Every political party, the business community, the financial sector and labour-sponsored funds oppose this plan. The federal government wants to create a financial markets authority like the one that already exists and that is getting good results in Quebec. We have rarely seen the business community in Quebec come together with a single voice to oppose this very bad idea by the federal government, which just wants to cater to Bay Street.

Let the federal government and Bay Street take note: the Bloc Québécois will always stand in the way of creating a single Canada-wide securities regulator. We will always say no, because a strong Quebec securities regulator means a strong talent pool to regulate the finance sector, which is essential for the sector's development.

Montreal is the 13th-largest financial centre in the world. It accounts for 150,000 jobs in Quebec and contributes \$20 billion to the GDP, or 6.3%. The Bloc Québécois will always fight to keep the regulation of the finance sector in Quebec. A strong financial hub is vital to the functioning of our head offices and the preservation of our businesses. Keeping the sector's regulator in Quebec ensures that decision-makers are nearby, which in turn enables access to capital markets for businesses, which is essential to support business investment and growth across Quebec.

Creating a single Canada-wide securities regulator is nothing short of an attack on our ability to keep our head offices and preserve the distinct pillars of our economy. The 578 head offices in Quebec represent 50,000 jobs with a salary that is twice as high as the Quebec average, in addition to 20,000 other jobs at specialized service providers such as accounting, legal, financial or computer services.

There are so many examples of the federal government overstepping its jurisdictions that Quebec can claim that its greatest political and economic enemy is within its own borders. I am talking about examples like implementing a universal pharmacare plan like the one in Quebec and creating a child care network like the one in Quebec. Also, Quebec's educational sector is not immune to federal interference, considering the millennium scholarship granted by Jean Chrétien's Liberal government, which was similar to scholarships that already existed in Quebec. The federal government also created an international education strategy to recruit foreign students to Canadian universities that competes with the strategy that already exists in Quebec.

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Why duplicate the structures and the efforts? Why not simply encourage the efforts already under way by funding them directly? Why duplicate the administrative burden and red tape to the detriment of Quebecers? This is also the case in research, where it is more subtle and insidious, given that research reflects the innovation and development of our societies from a practical standpoint.

• (1745)

Basic research has been put aside, is underappreciated and is being neglected. Going forward, the government must focus on society, not on the private interests of companies.

In closing [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] Motion No. 62, because health care is a provincial and Quebec jurisdiction. Ottawa has no right to dictate what they should do and impose a tax burden—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Vancouver East.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very delighted to enter this debate.

I would first like to thank the member for St. John's East for bringing his private member's motion forward, Motion No. 62.

Before I turn to the substance of the motion, I would like to take a moment to say how much I enjoy working with the member for St. John's East. I enjoy debating, discussing and collaborating with him on many issues. He is, in my view, one of the hardest-working members of Parliament in this House, holding major critic portfolios and sitting on at least two committees.

Some of the areas he is the critic for also crossover with my own, as foreign affairs and border measures inevitably impact immigration and those seeking asylum in Canada. I truly appreciate his wealth of knowledge, experience and thoughtful comments. We can always count on the member for a thorough analysis of complex issues, so I would just like to take a moment to give my thanks to him for his service and dedication.

Turning to the motion before us, it is with great pride that I support the motion for a federal dental care plan presented by the member. The motion reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should establish a federal dental care plan as soon as possible for Canadian families earning less than \$90,000 per year who are not covered by a dental care plan, as an interim measure toward the inclusion of full dental care in Canada's healthcare system.

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More than one in five Canadians avoid visiting a dentist each year because of the cost. In fact, some 33% of Canadians, or 12 million Canadians, have no dental insurance, and nearly seven million Canadians avoid going to the dentist every year because of the cost. It should not surprise anyone that Canada's most vulnerable have the highest rates of dental decay and disease. They also have the worst access to oral health services. Indigenous peoples have nearly twice as much dental disease as non-indigenous Canadians.

From a gender perspective, as expected, income-related inequalities in oral health are greater in women than men. None of this should be acceptable to anyone in this House. That is why the NDP is calling for a federal dental care plan.

As a down payment to kick start universal public dental care, we are calling for households with incomes below \$90,000 to get access to dental coverage. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated that this program would provide immediate support to 6.5 million people in Canada. This is not only the right thing to do; it is the smart thing to do.

The calls to emergency rooms in this country related to dental pain is estimated to cost taxpayers \$150 million per year. That is savings that could be reinvested into other essential services. Now, of course, that does not cover all of the costs to deliver a federal public dental care plan to every Canadian, but it is a start.

There are places that we can look to for funding for this critical program. Let me list a few examples. If we have the courage we could cancel the subsidies for fossil fuel industries and redirect a fraction of those dollars to a universal dental care program. Cancelling the subsidies to big oil would also, of course, steer Canada in the right direction in the fight against climate change and becoming a climate leader. Canada should, indeed, end subsidies to big oil. There is no question.

We could also apply a 1% wealth tax for those with fortunes of over \$20 million. If we did that, we would be able to find funding for the NDP's dental care program. There is no question.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated that the wealth tax would raise almost \$70 billion over 10 years. In the first year, let us say 2021, it would generate \$5.6 billion, and that would grow to \$9.5 billion by 2028-2029. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated that ongoing program costs for the NDP dental plan would average about \$1.5 billion per year. This is a choice New Democrats are happy to make. We just need the other parties to join us.

• (1750)

Of course, there are many other options, but the point is that the resources are there and can be there. It is not a question of whether we can afford a dental plan, but a question of priorities. For example, there is something really wrong when the big banks made approximately \$10 billion in profits during the pandemic while receiving \$750 billion in support from the government. Meanwhile, seniors are getting sick because they do not have dental support.

Did members know that poor oral health is a risk factor for aspiration pneumonia, dehydration and infirmity? Despite this, many retirement homes and long-term care facility residents do not have

adequate oral health due to cost. Poor dental health also affects pregnant women, leading to low birth weight and premature births. Also, did members know that the most common surgery performed on preschool children at most pediatric hospitals in Canada is for the treatment of dental decay?

The status quo is not acceptable. Our proposal to introduce a national dental care program for everyday families would cover 6.5 million people. Just imagine 6.5 million people who would be able to access dental services to avert dental diseases. I have had seniors tell me that they have to blend up their food because they cannot chew the food with their bad teeth. This is not acceptable. This cannot be okay for any of us, and we can do something about it.

For the members of Parliament who want to argue that we cannot provide universal dental care because it is a jurisdictional issue and that health care is all in the provincial jurisdiction, well, I have news for them. Health care has been defined by the Supreme Court of Canada as a shared jurisdiction. After all, that is why we have the Canada Health Act.

If members had believed in that argument, it would mean that we would not have universal health care. Can members imagine what our lives would be like if we did not have universal health care? We do not have to look far. We can look across the border to the United States and the situation there.

If we had let the jurisdictional arguments win the day, none of us could have fathomed that we would now have access to universal health care, thanks to Tommy Douglas. It is because of his dream and his vision that people can access the health care services that they need.

Of course, when universal health care was brought about, it was always part of that vision to include pharmacare and dental care. The Liberals and Conservatives voted against the NDP's bill on universal pharmacare, and that is a shame. They tried to argue that it is a jurisdictional issue. Of course, they fooled no one but themselves with that flimsy excuse.

Also, universal public dental care was first recommended in Canada by the Royal Commission on Health Services back in the 1960s. The only reason it was not incorporated into the universal health care system was because there was a shortage of dentists at the time. We do not have that problem now. We have ample dentists who can provide the service. It is time for Canada to take the actions to support everyday Canadians.

In closing, I would like to share this story with members.

I still remember when BladeRunners, a provincially funded employment training program for youth at risk, was brought about. It partnered with GM Place, now Rogers Arena, on a hiring scheme people in the Downtown Eastside, not just for the renovation work but also for hospitality work. Through that work, with a survey in the community in the Downtown Eastside, we learned that many people were concerned about the lack of dental care. They felt that not having good teeth was inhibitive for them to get employment in the hospitality industry. As part of the program, the government included dental support for trainees in partnership with UBC's dental program, and that was a game changer. People started to smile more and felt better about themselves. They had the confidence to take on the world, and yes, they became self-sufficient.

Dental service is a necessity for our physical health, for our mental health, for our economy and for our well-being. I ask all members to support this motion.

• (1755)

[Translation]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, quite a few Canadians have dental insurance through private health insurance plans, while many others are supported by provincial, territorial and federal government programs. Our provincial and territorial partners fund and manage dental services within their areas of responsibility and provide some dental coverage to residents for services provided outside hospitals. These dental care programs vary considerably from one community to the next and are often limited to certain groups such as children, people with disabilities and low-income households.

Our government supports provincial and territorial health care programs, including those that offer dental coverage, through the Canada health transfer or CHT. In 2021-22, the CHT will provide \$43.1 billion to the provinces and territories. This amount will continue to increase every year based on the economic growth rate, with a minimum increase of 3% per year.

Over the next five years, funding to the provinces and the territories through the CHT should exceed \$236 billion. The federal government also helps Canadians with their out-of-pocket dental expenses through the medical expenses tax credit. Taxpayers can claim this non-refundable tax credit for eligible medical expenses if these expenses are in excess of the lesser of 3% of net income or \$2,397 for the tax year that just passed, or 2020.

We know that 40% of dental care costs are paid directly by Canadians. However, even with these programs that are intended to complement private insurance plans, it has been shown that many Canadians still find the cost of care prohibitive.

We also know that income is not the only barrier preventing Canadians from accessing dental care. Roughly 96% of Canadians have been affected by preventable tooth decay. This has an impact on the more vulnerable populations, especially those in rural communities or within certain age groups, people with disabilities and racialized individuals, including indigenous people.

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In the 2019 throne speech and in the 2019 mandate letter of the Minister of Health, our government committed to working with Parliament to study and analyze the possibility of establishing a national dental care plan. Although we had evidence that there were access problems, that data is limited and we do not have enough current and complete data on unmet dental care needs across the country, without which many crucial factors remain unknown.

There is no consensus on the best way to address the gaps in access to dental care. In addition, the most efficient models for providing care and the way to respond to unmet dental care needs are still hotly debated among dental professionals.

What is more, it is unclear whether there is a need or an opportunity for a federal role in this area, which is largely under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. These are things a parliamentary study could clarify.

I would also like to thank the Standing Committee on Health, which decided to undertake such a study during the last parliamentary session. We are impatiently awaiting the results of this study, because we believe it should be completed before any decision is made on the most appropriate federal role to support access to dental care in the future.

I believe it would be premature for the government to commit to a broad federal program such as the one proposed in Motion No. 62 without consulting stakeholders such as health organizations, health professionals, those fighting poverty and indigenous stakeholders. These consultations are essential to identifying any approach that would improve access to dental care.

The government must also engage with provincial and territorial partners and private insurers before agreeing to any federal action that could have a considerable impact on their current services. In particular, the Parliamentary Budget Officer's estimates released last October did not take into account the impact of such a program on existing provincial and territorial dental programs or on the existing EI plan, either of which could reasonably be expected to modify their coverage in response to a new federal program.

Motion No. 62 would have Parliament approve a federal dental care plan with specific income thresholds as an interim measure toward the inclusion of full dental care in Canada's health care system without first carrying out the proposed parliamentary study.

The government recognizes that there are systemic gaps that leave some Canadians without access to dental care.

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• (1800)

However, committing to a particular federal program design without more information, committing to providing care in a particular way without knowing whether that approach will be the most effective, and doing so without engaging with the provinces and territories, which are generally responsible for dental care, is not the right way to go about this.

Accordingly, while the government is prepared to support a parliamentary study on the best way forward, I must ask our members and all members of the House to vote against Motion No. 62. Meanwhile, the government will continue to offer the existing programs that address the dental care needs I mentioned earlier.

Thanks to Statistics Canada, we are improving our understanding of this issue by including an oral health component for the next Canadian health measures survey. Funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, this research will be conducted in collaboration with leading researchers from all 10 of Canada's university faculties of dentistry and experts from the United States and the United Kingdom.

In closing, I would like to take a moment to recognize that dental care is just one aspect of the overall health care needs of Canadians. The government has a vested interest in improving the health care system so that it can meet the current and future needs of all Canadians. The government continues to play an active leadership role and collaborate with the provinces and territories to help them strengthen health care in Canada, especially during these difficult times.

The COVID-19 pandemic put considerable pressure on Canada's health care system and the government intensified its financial support for the provincial and territorial health care systems. Throughout this pandemic, our government provided a lot of support to the provincial and territorial partners. We made considerable investments in the recent federal budget, in the 2020 fall economic statement and, last year, in a series of COVID-19-related investments, including more than \$19 billion through the safe restart agreement and more recently, \$5 billion to help the provinces and territories deal with the backlogs in the health care system because of COVID-19 and for rolling out the vaccine.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Steveston—Richmond East will have seven minutes for his speech.

The hon. member.

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC): Madam Speaker, our country's health care system is nationally seen as a source of great pride. Canadians deserve and have come to expect a health care system that meets their needs and that does not leave anybody behind. I believe the government should always strive to improve the care Canadians receive while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

It has been made particularly clear over the last year that oral health and overall health are inextricably linked, as we saw people with poor oral health fare worse during COVID-19. We Conservatives believe the citizens of this country deserve the best care possi-

ble, in order to live a happy and healthy life, that our nation can afford to provide within our means. We believe in empowering Canadians to be able to look after themselves and trust them to make responsible choices. Rather than an Ottawa-knows-best approach, Canadians should be able to make decisions regarding their health, and our government should be able to support them without breaking the bank. For example, the previous Conservative government under Prime Minister Harper had made strides toward sufficient Canadian health care. His government refined the Canada health transfer to create a stable and predictable increase in funding Canadians need while restoring a balanced budget.

With that said, it has been shown through various reports that our health care system lags far behind those of other developed nations, such as the U.K. and Australia, which is made all the more damning when we take into account that Canada and Australia share a similar percentage of GDP spent on health care and dollars spent per person.

Currently, the federal government transfers roughly \$42 billion to the provinces each budget year. However, during that same time, even with a historically low borrowing rate, we still pay over \$20 billion in interest payments alone on our ballooning national debt, a simply unnecessary waste of \$20 billion in tax dollars that could be beneficially repurposed elsewhere, had our Liberal government had the foresight to act responsibly in preparation for hard times. It is therefore obvious that the health care challenges we are facing are not a resource problem.

How is it that Canada cannot seem to adequately provide for its people or responsibly manage our fiscal resources? Better yet, what can we do about this? These are two of the many questions I doubt my NDP colleagues could answer.

The Parliamentary Budget Office has weighed in with an analysis of the cost of the proposed program. It estimates that financing the plan would cost almost \$10 billion over the next few years. Even that estimation, however, does not necessarily reflect the true price we might have to pay. The report released by the PBO states that its assumptions and calculations reflect moderate uncertainty as it is difficult to predict how behaviours might change from an increase in demand.

With that said, it can be understood where the NDP is coming from. After seeing how the current government spends money like it is an eight-year-old playing a game of Monopoly, it is no wonder the New Democrats are not worried about the potential cost of their proposal. After all, they must be thinking what does a few more billion spent matter when we had accumulated close to \$100 billion in debt pre-pandemic, lost our nation's AAA credit rating and are now almost \$1.3 trillion in debt. Motion No. 62 proposes a measure that would bring a health benefit, but likely at a cost, which would require unfortunate austerity elsewhere, or worse yet, transferring even more debt to future generations.

The Conservatives cannot support being so cavalier with our hard-earned taxpayer dollars. We believe in approaching the issues of inadequate access to dental coverage from a practical and realistic perspective.

What other concerns might the NDP not address? Most obviously, there is policy that fails to recognize the important separation of powers that exist in our country. In Canada, the operation and funding of health care programs fall under the authority of the provincial governments. This way, the specific needs of individual provinces are met without interference. An Ottawa-knows-best approach breaches the fundamental partnership that is supposed to exist between the federal and provincial governments.

• (1805)

The framework proposed by the NDP fails to allow for provincial participation, and instead eliminates what is supposed to be a collaborative agreement between the two levels of management. This is particularly the case given that the provinces are the ones that best understand the needs and intricacies of their respective health care systems. As such, a solution should work to support existing provincial programs or increase health transfers to the provinces for them to be better able to meet the needs of their constituents.

We have also heard from major stakeholders that say the NDP's plan misses the mark. The Canadian Dental Association, CDA, which is the national voice for dentistry, representing tens of thousands of dentists across the country, has voiced its concerns. Although the association agrees that any steps taken towards addressing issues of oral health are commendable, a bad proposal with the best intent may cause more harm than good. This is just like when the dentist gives a child a sugary lollipop after her visit.

• (1810)

The CDA further notes that they believe a superior approach to increasing access to oral health care would be to improve funding for existing public programs. This speaks volumes, as it means that the largest organization in Canada authorized to speak on the behalf of dentists from coast to coast to coast does not endorse the proposed policy. Why would the NDP purport to believe it knows better than the dentists themselves what would constitute an improvement to the current system?

Conservatives believe that there exist better options for improving access to dental care instead of the NDP's proposal. COVID-19 has negatively impacted the global economy and has greatly increased near-term uncertainty. Historically Canada's health care ex-

penditures have dwindled and grown with the status of our economy. Given the magnitude of health care spending brought forth by this pandemic, we may be in a position to see this trend change. However, this change will be because we take steps to secure Canada's future.

In short, national dental care, like national pharmacare before it, is an NDP proposal we could not afford before, and we certainly cannot afford it now. Though personally, I do hold hope for a future where we can.

• (1815)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to conclude debate on this very important motion, which calls for the establishment of a federal dental plan for all Canadian families with a family income of less than \$90,000 a year and who do not currently have a dental care plan. It envisages free coverage for those with incomes less than \$70,000 and a sliding pay scale for those over. This would be an interim measure toward the inclusion of full dental care in Canada's health care system.

I want to thank those who have spoken in favour of the motion, and especially my colleagues, the member for Vancouver Kingsway and the member for Vancouver East. I also want to thank all the people and organizations from across the country who have been working so hard on this issue and have been supportive of this motion.

Canadians are justly proud of our health care system because universal medicare is a defining element of our society. When we ask about it in public opinion polls, it is regarded as a national treasure. Our system ensures that regardless of social status, income or where in the country people live, they are entitled, as a matter of right, to access physicians and hospital care and treatment. However, dental care is not included. It was supposed to be. The vision of Tommy Douglas, who is considered to have provided the inspiration for medicare in Canada, was for a comprehensive system that included dental care.

The Royal Commission on Health Services, which laid out the plan for our current system, reported in 1964 and called for universal public dental services as part of a national health care plan. However, it noted that the shortage of dentists was so acute at the time, it would be impossible to implement a universal system, though it was a priority. That is no longer true, yet today most dental care is not covered by any public insurance plan. In Canada, 94% of spending on dental care is private and only 6% comes from government programs. This is the second-lowest level of government spending on dental care among the OECD countries. As a result, many are left behind and do not get care.

About 35% of Canadians have no dental coverage at all, and more than 20% of Canadians avoid going to the dentist because of the cost. Left untreated, poor dental hygiene is linked to many chronic health conditions that would largely be prevented with proper dental care.

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The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that this plan would benefit over six and a half million people in Canada who are not covered by dental insurance and are unable to afford the cost. That includes more than half of Canadians with low incomes and seniors over 60 years old, and more than 25% of women. Some 30% of young people would benefit from this program. These are young adults who are no longer covered by their family plan or who never had a plan in the first place. Unsurprisingly, low-income and marginalized Canadians are hurt the most, with Canada's most vulnerable population having the highest rates of dental decay and disease and the worst access to care. The sustained cost for this program has been estimated by the PBO to be \$1.5 billion annually. It is not a small sum, but it is less than one-half of 1% of Canada's current health care costs.

Some have opposed the plan on the grounds that health care is a provincial responsibility under the Constitution, but that is mistaken. The Supreme Court of Canada has defined it as a shared jurisdiction. Hospitals fall under provincial jurisdiction, but health care is shared, and the federal government can provide for a dental service.

The Conservatives have suggested that rather than having a national plan, we should support the status quo patchwork of dental coverage. However, millions of youth, seniors and low-income families are falling through the cracks. Dental care as a part of health care must be accessible for all people in Canada.

The Liberals have said that we do not have enough data or the right kind of data, and that it will take until 2024 to get there and we need more studies. However, we know there is a desperate and urgent need for dental care, which is all we need to know to take action. This is an interim measure that we can put in place immediately while we collect the data and work out the details with the provinces for a universal system.

This is a health issue. This is a social justice issue. This is an equality issue. It can be put in place right now. It is a practical solution to address the significant health care inequality in our country. This is a problem we can fix and we must fix.

I want to urge all members of Parliament, each of whom has access to excellent health and dental care benefits through the House of Commons, to vote in favour of this motion. As I said, it is a problem that we can fix and we must fix.

● (1820)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The question is on the motion.

[*Translation*]

If a member of a recognized party present in the House wishes to request a recorded division or that the motion be adopted on division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus: Madam Speaker, we would like a recorded vote.

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): Pursuant to order made on Monday, January 25, the division stands

deferred until Wednesday, June 16, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

[*English*]

Pursuant to order made on Thursday, June 3, the House shall now resolve itself into committee of the whole to consider Motion No. 7 under government business.

[*Translation*]

I do now leave the chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

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[*Translation*]

MEMBERS NOT SEEKING RE-ELECTION TO THE 44TH PARLIAMENT

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 7, Mrs. Alexandra Mendès in the chair)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Before we begin this evening's debate, I would like to remind hon. members of how proceedings will unfold.

Pursuant to order adopted Thursday, June 3, each member speaking will be allotted 10 minutes for debate. No time will be allotted for questions and comments, and members may share their time with another member. The Chair will receive no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent.

[*English*]

We will now begin tonight's take-note debate.

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That this committee take note of members not seeking re-election to the 44th Parliament.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): How come I am the first one up, Mr. Speaker?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Wayne Easter: Will you bring this place to order, Mr. Speaker.

Madam Speaker, who was there before, is my floor mate on the 12th floor of the Valour Building. Congratulations to her in her role in the chamber.

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It does seem rather strange to be making this kind of statement virtually rather than in the chamber, where I am so honoured to have served for nearly 28 years. As members know, I am currently the third-longest serving member of the House, a whole four hours ahead of the member for Vancouver Centre, my oftentimes seat-mate and wonderful colleague for all those parliamentary sessions in government, in official opposition, as the third party and again in government now. I will not say anything about her shoes, the ones we pretty much need sunglasses for to sit beside her.

This chamber is a place of history and of decisions, good and sometimes not so good, that have built this country to what it is today, a country that is recognized as one of the best places in the world in which to live. Sometimes we, from all parties, often through strenuous debate and sometimes late-night votes, have the opportunity to influence the legislative mandate and governance of this country. We may not always get our way, but this is the place, in this chamber, where we can have our say. It is intimidating in the chamber and inspirational at the same time. I have been honoured, as we all have been honoured, as one of a small percentage of Canadians over time who has called the House his workplace.

When I ran for the Liberal Party nomination for Malpeque in June 1993, it was a fairly active nomination that went into the wee hours of the next morning. I must thank each and every one of the candidates who has actively supported me ever since. The Malpeque executive, the campaign managers, the campaign teams, the people in communication and supporters are every bit as responsible for me achieving nine electoral victories as I am. I sincerely thank them for their active support and encouragement.

To the constituents of Malpeque, what can I say? It has been an honour to serve as their MP for the past three decades. Their support is very much appreciated, from my heart. Their active involvement, whether through visits to the office or on the streets, always meant good advice to keep me grounded and in touch with issues that matter in Islanders' lives.

Sometimes a constituent would go a little overboard, like the time during an election that a farmer friend of mine put a four-by-eight plywood sign along the highway demanding that the minister of agriculture and I get our butts over to the GATT negotiations and protect supply management. We did and we were successful, but he was very, very demanding.

Words cannot be found to express my appreciation to my family for their support. I was not supposed to get emotional. As all members in this place know, as MPs our time is really never our own. Worse, families may have to put up with our political procrastinations, which sometimes we think on first blush are brilliant, but that may not be true.

I give a huge thanks to Helen, my spouse, our children Kimberly and Jamie, and their extended families with Marc and Gaya. We are fortunate to have four grandchildren born during my time as a member: Alexander, Sophia, Ila and Fiara. Immediate family members always were, as they still are, available with advice, even when it was not asked for.

• (1825)

The unsung heroes for any member of Parliament work in our constituency offices: our constituency and Hill staff. At the constituency level, they deal with real-life issues that impact people daily on the ground such as EI, CPPD, immigration, seniors issues and many more. Casework is what we call it. There are too many past employees to name, but I thank them along with current folks Robin Moore, Alan Waddell, Kim MacDonald and Krystal Rice for their work on behalf of Islanders.

Much appreciation goes to Hill staff for their efforts in casework, research, legislation and a multitude of responsibilities in support of my efforts at committees on issues, legislation and the Canada-U.S. IPG. I give a big thanks to current staff James Auer and Jeremy Wains for their work on behalf of Canadians. There were many late nights spent working on those issues on Parliament Hill.

I also appreciate all the work my previous employees on Parliament Hill have done and I want to mention one: Michael O'Neill, who passed away following the 2015 election. We worked together for 22 years and he was always happiest when we were challenging our own government. There are many employees on Parliament Hill who assist us in our work, from parliamentary pages to clerks, security guards, cafeteria staff and janitors, translators, interpreters and analysts with the Library of Parliament. Their work does not go unnoticed, and I thank them on behalf of all Canadians.

I want to recognize one Library of Parliament analyst whose work with the Canada-U.S. IPG over many years has made possible the personal relationships many of us have with our American counterparts today, which truly assist in leading to cross-border solutions. I know I speak for my co-chair, Senator MacDonald, and past co-chairs Rob Merrifield and the late Gord Brown. I want to thank June Dewetering for her exceptional service to Canadians as a result of her knowledge of U.S. politics and her friendships with congressional and Senate leaders.

I have been fortunate to have served in many roles in Parliament. I have served on numerous committees, and as parliamentary secretary to fisheries and parliamentary secretary to agriculture. I thank Prime Minister Chrétien for appointing me to cabinet as Solicitor General. I remember vividly the call to Attorney General John Ashcroft when cabinet made the decision not to join the war in Iraq. That was an interesting chat with my U.S. counterpart.

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It has been my privilege to serve under three prime ministers while in government: Prime Minister Chrétien, Prime Minister Martin and the current Prime Minister. They carry a heavy responsibility, as all prime ministers do. I have sincerely enjoyed chairing the finance committee and working with members of all parties.

I will say that I came with tremendous experience from having been president of the NFU, and I had seen much of Canada. I firmly believe that Canada as a country can be stronger than the sum of its parts. I have seen the country from coast to coast, and I want to give a bit of advice. Members of Parliament have to know this country, and we are a little too restrictive on the travel that MPs are allowed to do. When I first started, before there was the Internet, members were able to take tours of the country. We could see it, meet people on the ground, understand it and see their lives in real life. This place has to get back to that again to give MPs the opportunity to know their country.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize you and all of the previous Speakers for attempting to keep order in the House, mostly successfully, although one Speaker cut me off during the chicken dance I was doing with the member for Carleton.

Let me close with this. I said yesterday in remarks, and you say in your prayer, Mr. Speaker, that we are fortunate to have the freedom, opportunity and peace that we enjoy in Canada. That is so very true. It has been my honour to work with and serve the residents of Malpeque, and it has been my honour to work with all members across political lines. It is the discussion, it is getting to know each other and it is the debate that, at the end of the day, makes for better policy and a better country.

• (1830)

The Speaker: The Speaker is not supposed to take sides or show any partiality. The next person is someone I have had the pleasure to work with for the last six years. He has been an amazing Deputy Speaker. He is a gentleman, and I mean a gentleman by every meaning of the word.

Colleagues, the hon. member for Simcoe North.

[Translation]

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very difficult to believe that this is my last official speech in the House of Commons. Since 2011, I have generally participated in the debates in this august House only as the Chair occupant.

[English]

What a journey these last 15 years have been. My interest in politics started about a year or so after I graduated and joined the family business. As a young man I attended this huge nomination meeting for local federal Conservatives. There were more than 2,000 members in attendance, seven or eight candidates, speeches, placards and a political buzz that I had never seen or experienced before. After that, I was hooked.

That nomination event replaced the retiring member of Parliament, Philip Rynard, who had been the MP for my riding for eight consecutive terms. The candidate they chose to carry on after him was the Hon. Doug Lewis, who would go on to serve in former Prime Minister Mulroney's cabinet until 1993. Doug remains a val-

ued supporter and confidant, and I thank him for blazing the trail and being a great mentor to me.

Oddly enough, only one MP separated Doug and me. That was the Hon. Paul DeVillers, who served here from 1993 until just prior to my election. I quickly learned that the high standards of service they all provided set the tone for what kind of work would be expected of me.

I say all this because I am only the fourth member of Parliament for Simcoe North in my lifetime. The next MP for this amazing riding would be well advised to heed the lessons that Rynard, Lewis, DeVillers and I learned from the great people of Simcoe North.

May I take this moment to thank them all profoundly for the honour of being their voice in Parliament these 15-plus years.

• (1835)

[Translation]

I would now like to make some other acknowledgements. One of the things that I am very grateful for is having the opportunity to learn French. Since 2006, I have taken courses from the language training service, here, in the House of Commons. I have spent two hours per week to keep up my comprehension and vocabulary as well as to improve my language skills over time.

Thanks to Roseline Lemire, my teacher for 15 years, I can speak and understand this beautiful language. I thank her and the entire language training team very much.

I also want to thank Lorraine Bergeron, who was my part-time teacher in my riding.

They opened my heart to the richness of the francophone culture in my riding and across the country. I will always be proud of this particular life achievement.

[English]

I want to properly thank the people of my riding who helped me win these five consecutive elections. All of us, as MPs, can look back to the volunteers who helped fundraise, put up signs, knocked on doors, phoned and got the vote out.

I salute the hundreds of them who helped me win. I want to give special mention to several who led those efforts with extraordinary commitment: Wayne Edgett, Rod Williams, Phil DeBruyne, Steve McFadden, Claire and Dave Dusome, Charlene Anderson, Avery Bassett, Diane Bell, Kirk Farquhar, Alison Stoneman, Frank Takacs and Jim Hutchinson.

After serving these many years, I have inevitably had exceptional volunteer leaders in my campaigns who are no longer with us. I think, in particular, of George German, Edna Parker, Scott Macpherson, Andy Durnford and my eminent adviser and counsel, Dave Anderson. There is a quote attributed to Abraham Lincoln that says, "I'm a success today because I had a friend who believed in me and I didn't have the heart to let him down."

As I reflect on these amazing women and men who gave their valuable time and energy to my success in politics, I am moved beyond words by their unfailing support.

When it came to the essential work of being a member of Parliament, I do not have to look any farther than the talented people in my riding and my parliamentary offices. For my constituents, these were the first people they would see: They were the first smiling faces, the first voices that would greet them and the first impression they would take of the courtesy and services of our office.

They earned the praise, the kind notes and the small gifts of chocolate and candies that constituents would leave for them, whether after solving a tough case or even for their simple courtesies. They are the best, and I am going to miss working with them.

I have to name some of them. Here in Ottawa right now is Connie Kennedy-Pearsall. Prior to Connie were Ashley Peyrard, Sarah Pendlebury and Linda Rudd. All of them helped me here on the Hill immensely. In the riding, Kurtis Schlueter, Christine Elsdon, Judy Fulsom, Kelly Banks, David Dalrymple and Diane Bell have been doing yeoman's work these past years and building upon the outstanding work of former staff members James Nicol, Judy Forma, Brooke Leishman and the volunteers and interns who helped along the way.

Mr. Speaker, you will realize that working as a presiding officer in this chamber teams you up with an impeccable group of professionals always on the administrative aspects of the House. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and our fellow Chair occupants, the hon. members for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking and Brossard—Saint-Lambert, for their advice and friendship. What a pleasure it has been to work with you all.

Since 2011, we have had the honour to work with these remarkable clerks and table officers of the House. Their learned counsel, their deference to parliamentary traditions and practices and their untiring devotion to their work provides a constant source of confidence and integrity to the operations of the House. It is unbelievable each and every day what they do.

To the pages and page supervisors, you are an irreplaceable support to the work of presiding officers. I thank you for your kind and capable service, not just to us but to all members of the House.

To sergeants-at-arms, interpreters, TVOs and journals staff, who are not here but down below, I thank you for your quiet and meticulous attention literally to each and every second of our proceedings. While I am at it, may I finally salute all those in the operations of the parliamentary precinct, food services, maintenance, security and administration, who make this a safe and proficient workplace, even when the unusual or the perilous threatens to disrupt our work.

However, I could not have done this work without the support of family, especially my wife and best friend in the world, Heather. When we started, she was just finishing her teaching degree at York University. We did not know really what we were getting into, but we managed as best we could. Thank you, honey, for your love and devotion and for assuming the role of, by the way, a superb public servant by association these last 15 years, and for the support of your parents, Ian and Joan MacDougall.

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Our kids have been incredibly patient and kind of proud of their old man in some ways. They helped us on campaigns, accepted weekly absences and busy weekends and were always completely supportive of the work that often put some distance between us.

Valerie and Lauren were age 10 and 7 when we started here, and now they are off on their own careers. Our older children, Stephanie and her husband John, and Jason and his wife Amanda, have families of their own, and we can hardly wait to spend a bit more time with them. To Carter, Sienna and Vivian, and to Lyla, Jack and Leo, nana and granddad are going to be around a little more in the years ahead, and what a blessing that will be.

My brother, Doug, and sisters Sandra and Dianne may be watching this. I want them to know how much I have appreciated their constant encouragement. They will know that our dad, Ron, was the inspiration for my entry into politics. Dad passed away in 2014, and I know he was immensely proud of my work and service. They know that his legacy lives on in us, and my mom has continued that interest and affection for public service that he taught us so well.

Now, as the late Jim Flaherty would say, I have probably gone on about as long as it seems, so let me finish by simply saying what an incredible privilege it has been to serve here since 2006, to work alongside and learn from the energy and dedication of members of Parliament from across our country, to be in our parliamentary caucus with Prime Minister Harper and party leaders since, Rona Ambrose and the honourable members for Regina—Qu'Appelle and Durham, and my fellow members of caucus who leave no task wanting when it comes to keeping our rather intricate Conservative coalition united and ready to serve as Canadians call upon us to do.

● (1840)

I will be taking my leave when the next election comes, whenever that may be, but I will always remember the friends that we made along the way and the special honour it has been to be a humble servant of this House and the member for Simcoe North.

● (1845)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Louise Charbonneau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking you and your colleagues, the Deputy Speaker of the House and the two Assistant Deputy Speakers of the House, for the dignity and efficiency with which you have honoured the function of Speaker of the House. Thanks to your vigilance and impartiality, you have enabled me, a 70-year-old novice, to speak in this place on behalf of the people of Trois-Rivières and defend their interests. Thank you for that.

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I would like to thank all the House of Commons employees, the interpreters and the IT staff, who are doing amazing work in every way during these pandemic times.

I also want to mention the work my incredible riding office team has done, the one that was with me when I started as an MP and the one that is with me now. Some of them believed in me before I even put my name on the ticket. Their loyalty, their unconditional support and their confidence shaped me as a politician. Gabriel, Nicolas, Josée and André have dedicated themselves to serving constituents. They have done whatever it takes to meet our constituents' needs. An MP could never do this job alone without her team. I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

Because of the pandemic and the adjustments required as a result, this term will certainly have been one of the most extraordinary in recent years. I would even say that this term will go down in history. I am very proud to have been able to help many of my constituents before and during the pandemic.

I also had to adapt to the new reality imposed by the lockdowns. Specifically, I had to learn to use the technology needed to sit virtually and to vote using facial recognition. None of this is easy at my age. Because of COVID-19, I will miss out on the experience of typical parliamentary life on the Hill, which I must admit is something I will regret. That is why I wanted to be here, in the chamber, for my farewell speech.

This term has been especially difficult for me in many ways. This year, I lost my sister, Danielle, to COVID-19. It has also kept me away from my children, grandchildren and family. On top of that, one of my staffers is still suffering from the effects of two cancers after 50 weeks.

Despite this very difficult context, I have nevertheless noticed some wonderful things during my parliamentary activities.

● (1850)

Among other things, I have been pleased to see the considerable strides women have made for several years now in politics, but I also see how much work is left to do. I still hold the conviction that this different, feminist, open policy is the way of the future. I very much hope that the new generations will follow suit.

During parliamentary work and the periods of confinement, I learned, and I realized one thing: I still have so many dreams to fulfill. Being a member of Parliament was one of my biggest. In that sense, I still consider myself blessed. I still have tremendous energy that I will use in other areas of life. Thus, the reason behind this decision not to pursue a second mandate is an urgency to live. However, rest assured, my passion for politics remains intact. I intend to pursue my work as a member of Parliament with the same diligence, until such a time as the citizens of Trois-Rivières are called to the polls and my successor is elected.

Of course, I have a special thought for the men and women who, by participating in the electoral process, chose to place their trust in me and afforded me the honour of representing them in the House of Commons. To the people of Trois-Rivières, thank you.

On a more personal level, I am so grateful to my husband for his unconditional support through the hectic pace of political life. He

has been there for me throughout my career as a canvasser, as president of the executive, as campaign director and, finally, as candidate and Bloc Québécois member of Parliament for Trois-Rivières. Thanks a million, Michel.

Thank you to my family, my friends, my fellow canvassers in Trois-Rivières, Nicole Philippe, and the Bloc Québécois executive, all of whom have supported me through this wild ride in politics.

Lastly, I want to thank my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois with whom I have had the honour and privileged of serving the people of Trois-Rivières. I do not think the House will mind if I acknowledge my mentor, the francophone dean of the House of Commons, Louis Plamondon. His leadership and advice were a huge help to me here, and it was his Plamondism, as I like to call it, that helped me stay connected to my constituents throughout the pandemic lockdowns. I have very much missed that feeling of closeness and human connection to my constituents during this time.

I also want to express my appreciation for my colleagues. I have been blown away so many times by their knowledge of the issues, their genuine commitment, their passion, their sincerity, and their hard work on their own files, all in the name of improving the lives of Quebecers.

● (1855)

I will always cherish my memories of each of them.

Finally, I would like to give a shout-out to my leader, Yves-François Blanchet, who continued to impress me every day with his public speaking and analysis skills and his leadership. He proved time and time again, both before and during the pandemic, that he is a true head of state, and he will go down in history as such. Thank you for everything.

In closing, I am very proud of what I have accomplished. I have changed and grown a lot since I was elected in 2019 and since I was sworn in as the Bloc Québécois member for Trois-Rivières. I am proud of the woman and politician I have become. I am entering this final stage with enthusiasm and optimism. Like one of my friends often tells me, "Make a nice life for yourself".

That is what I intend to do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you, the House leaders and the whips for organizing this event this evening, to give me and the others who are not running again an opportunity to speak to Parliament and to make what has been called a farewell speech. However, a few things about that seem a little funny or odd to me. We may of course all be here again in September if there is no election, so it is a bit of an "in case" speech. Also, it is a farewell speech made from 1,500 miles away through Zoom and it is also for some of the people who I have not really come to know since 2019, when I was once again elected. It is a little unfortunate in that way because of the pandemic.

We have been hard at work despite the lack of personal contact, doing a lot of great things. We are continuing to do that even today when I had the honour of concluding the last speech on a private member's motion on dental care for Canadians. We have just completed a report that will be presented to the House on racism and policing in Canada, which I had the honour of initiating with others last July. We are very busy. We were very much enjoying our work in these last few days that we voted to stay open until midnight. One wonders who would want to leave all of this. It is so much fun and so dedicated, and we seem to be enjoying our work.

One might ask why would we want to leave. For me, part of the answer is that I came to the House in the 33rd Parliament, having been elected in a by-election when Ed Broadbent was in his prime as leader of the NDP and Brian Mulroney was the prime minister. At that time, I learned very early as a parliamentarian, and I think the member for Malpeque made note of this, that I could play a role even in a majority Parliament and be effective in amending legislation or contributing to the debate and influencing the course of events under debate in the House.

We had a very strong group of members of Parliament under Ed's leadership. I do not think anyone from the 33rd Parliament remains here. I know Wayne has 28 years of service, but he started in 1993. I am sorry to hear from the member for Malpeque that Mike O'Neill has passed away. He was my legislative assistant in 1987-88. The member for Malpeque had a great man to work with him. He understood Newfoundland and Labrador pretty well too. I am glad he served him for so long. I saw him many times over the years.

I was then defeated in the 1988 general election and I was not to return to the House as a member for 20 more years.

I will tell one little story. When I first ran in 1987, the seat I ran for was St. John's East. No New Democrat since Confederation in 1948 and hardly any Liberals had been elected to that seat. Maybe once or twice back in the sixties a Liberal was elected. I had offered myself to the nomination.

I was practising law at the time. When I went to see a judge to sign some papers, the judge, who had served provincially, said to me, "Well, Mr. Harris, I hear you're going into politics, if it could be said that running for the NDP was going into politics." I was supposed to laugh because it was supposed to be a joke. Then he spent the next 45 minutes telling me what a great honour it was to be a politician. A "noble calling" he called it, to play a role in making the laws that govern our people. He talked about his experiences with Joey Smallwood, etc.

He was not right about the question of whether I was going into politics, although I never believed I would have the kind of career I did, with 10 years in the federal Parliament and 16 years provincially, but I never have forgotten the phrase "noble calling", that we are here to serve our people, that we have a role to play, that it is an important one and it is a big honour to do that.

When I was defeated in 1988, I did not really think of a pause in the parliamentary sense. I took what I learned in Parliament and I brought it to the House of Assembly in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1990. I was elected five times, serving for nearly 16

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years, most of which as leader of the New Democratic Party in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

● (1900)

I came back in 2008 at the behest of Jack Layton. I was here until 2015, serving mostly as the defence critic, with stints as public safety critic and justice critic. I really enjoyed the inspirational leadership of Jack Layton who brought us to official opposition status. He then very sadly and tragically died and was replaced by Thomas Mulcair, who, as we know, is considered one of the most effective opposition leaders in modern times.

I was, unfortunately, defeated again in 2015 and had a four-year hiatus as a former member of Parliament, but I did enjoy some time with the Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians. I highly recommend that to anyone who is leaving the House. It is a great group of people and it is a good way to keep in touch with former colleagues as well as some people who we did not serve with but got to know. Whether we leave voluntarily or otherwise after the next election, it is a good idea to keep in touch with those with whom we have served.

I came back in 2019, which is why I am here today. I did not really want to belabour this story except to provide some background to my unique parliamentary experience with bookends that span a total of 34 years. The member for Malpeque served 28 years, but they were consecutive. He did not have the variety I had. He is a seasoned member of Parliament, having served all his time here. He had more significant experience to draw on in the House.

I have enjoyed all my years as a member of Parliament. It has been a great experience and, as everyone else who is to speak I am sure will say, it is an honourable profession. It is also a big honour and privilege to serve constituents in the House of Commons. We cannot do that without their support, and I thank very sincerely all the voters of St. John's East. Whether they voted for me or not, they were my constituents. I thank them for their support over the years, for the privilege of serving them in the House of Commons and being their voice, and doing my best to do that.

I also represent the people of Newfoundland and Labrador as the only New Democrat from our province, and, right now, I am the only opposition member from the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The voters and the constituents are the heartbeat of politics. We communicate with them, work with them and help them when we can. I have always loved and enjoyed very much the people part of politics.

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Ten minutes is not much time to say a lot other than to thank people, thank to the volunteers, campaigners and donors who made this possible. We also have to thank our families. Without the kind of support we get from them, we would not be able to do our jobs.

My wife Ann and our three children, Amelia, Sarah and John, have been a great support for me. They have encouraged me and have enjoyed my work. I thank my staff who helped me do my job. I could not do it without them. I thank my constituency staff and Ottawa staff who have helped my constituents as best they can. It is amazing what we can do for constituents in the system we have.

We also have great staff on the Hill. The Library of Parliament's resources have been fabulous for me and have helped with our committees, and we all know that.

I want to reiterate what the member for Malpeque said about our Parliament. It is not perfect. A lot of work needs to be done to make our world perfect and our Parliament perfect. However, it is a great system for the voices of the people to be heard, to work together with other parliamentarians to try to make things better. As I said, it is a noble calling.

I want to encourage young people who are thinking about a career in politics to take the torch, to carry the torch and to do the job. It is a noble calling. It is worth doing and it is a worthy way to work to make our country better and to try to make the world better and safer. There are plenty of things to do and not enough people to do them, so please take up the cause.

● (1905)

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Malton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over the years I have risen to speak on many timely topics and pressing issues, including the pandemic we are dealing with, but today is different. Today will be the last time I address the House. I would like to share some reflections on my time in politics and what I have learned along the way as the member of Parliament for Mississauga—Malton.

I will begin by expressing how grateful I am to have had the opportunity to serve my vibrant community and this beautiful country for over 13 years.

First, I want to thank the people of Brampton and Mississauga, who put their faith in me as their federal representative on five separate occasions. I have tried to be worthy of their trust and never ever took it for granted.

As hon. members know all too well, politics is something that we do not do alone. It is a team sport, and I have been blessed with fantastic teammates throughout my career. I thank my colleagues in the House for their friendship and their guidance; my hard-working staff and our top-tier public servants; the relentless commitment shown by my riding association; and the hundreds of volunteers who donate their time to make this country a better place. I owe them more than I can express.

I would like to especially thank the Right Hon. Prime Minister for his confidence and friendship over the years. Serving as a member of his cabinet has been the honour of a lifetime. I am pleased to have had such a direct role in crafting economic policies and programs for all Canadians.

Politics is not easy on families. I want to single out my amazing, beautiful wife, Bram, and my remarkable daughters, Nanki and Kirpa, for all of the sacrifices they have made to make my service possible. I thank them very much. Their love and support have meant the world to me, and any possible reservations I have about leaving this place disappear when I think about spending more time with them together.

When my parents immigrated to Canada in the 1970s, they could never imagine in their wildest dreams that their son would end up here. My father moved to Canada from India, from a small village in Rajasthan. He spoke very little English and had five dollars to his name, but he came here for better economic opportunities. In a few years, my father learned carpentry from an Italian Canadian cabinetmaker who called him Vincenzo, which he thought sounded better than Balwinder. My father wore that handle as a badge of honour.

My mother worked the night shift at a cookie factory so that she could be home each morning to help make breakfast for my brother Harjot and I and help us tie our patkas, which is a head covering for young Sikh kids. She knew how important it was for me to play sports, and I loved sports. To do so confidently, I needed my patkas tied well. She worked all night but always made it home in time so that I could go to school feeling sure and confident about myself.

They both worked hard and did well, and my father eventually bought a cabinet company of his own and moved the family from Jane and Finch to Brampton. Even with that success, I do not think he ever expected our family to go from cabinetmakers to sitting at the cabinet table. Only in Canada.

My parents instilled in me at an early age the understanding that this country has been so good to us that we must give back to it. It was our responsibility to help create the same opportunities for others. That is not to say that I did not face my share of challenges. Looking a bit different as a kid, I had my share of unwelcome remarks and teasing. However, I grew up in the era of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

● (1910)

For me, a pivotal moment was the Baltej Singh Dhillon case, where an observant Sikh RCMP officer was granted the right to wear his turban with his uniform. There was controversy, for sure, but for a young Sikh boy, the message I heard was that I belong and I can play a meaningful role in our institutions. Looking back, I can see that these changes were the realizations of an inclusive and multicultural society that was the hard-fought vision of former prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau and many others. It showed a gradual willingness to accept, evolve and celebrate.

When I decided to run for office, I chose the party of the charter, the Liberal Party, as my political family. However, even there, I encountered those who felt I should hide my identity. "Don't put your picture in the brochure", one very senior party voice told me. At that moment, I was taken aback, but I just took it in and stayed silent. However, I am pleased to report that my silence did not last too long and not only did I not take that advice, but I decided to put my picture in every single brochure. My view was that if I was going to be on the ballot, I wanted people to know the person they were putting their faith into. I was not going to hide my identity or conceal who I was. By the way, in case people were wondering, I won the first election with 57% of the vote, the widest margin in the region of Peel. It was not the first time I had stood up for equality, and it would not be the last.

Soon after my first election, the same-sex marriage debate tested my commitment to stand up. Many of my constituents did not agree with same-sex marriage, but to me the choice was clear: People love whom they love and we cannot decide what rights go to which people, end of story. I took a lot of flak for that position, but I am proud that I made it. For someone who has always looked different, I knew there was no other option. That is also how I defended it to those who would complain about their own discrimination in one breath while advocating discrimination against others in the next.

When I was appointed the Minister of Industry, I was acutely aware that I was the first person of colour to hold that role, and I was absolutely determined to leave the door open wider for others. While there were many initiatives that we took to create jobs and accelerate science and innovation, I am most proud of speaking up for equality and equity among decision-makers. I was proud to introduce the 50-30 challenge. This initiative asked that organizations in the private and public sector aspire to two goals: gender parity on Canadian boards and among senior management, and significant representation, at least 30%, among those same leaders representing under-represented groups, such as Black Canadians, persons living with disabilities, LGBTQ2S, and our first nations, Inuit and Métis people. To date, more than 1,000 Canadian organizations have taken up the challenge to move the under-represented into positions of economic influence and leadership.

While things are objectively better in this country for those marked as different, we still have a long journey ahead of us. I, like many Canadians, was heartbroken when I heard the tragic news about the 215 children found at a former residential school in Kamloops. It should remind all of us that there are still those on the outside looking in, and that Canada is very much a work in progress and we have much to do on reconciliation.

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As we are dealing with this historic tragedy, we were horrified to see in London, Ontario that hate is alive and well. Hate is poisonous, and it is a thing that lashes out at those whose only crime is being different. I also wear my faith for the world to see, and that could have been my family.

While I know there is not a person in this House who would not condemn these crimes, we must remember that every time we stoke division, the seeds of hate are planted and watered. The country looks to us in these moments, but what we say and what we do in between these moments has just as much impact.

● (1915)

[*Translation*]

There are those in this country who claim to still serve the public interest by passing laws on discrimination and pitting Canadians against each other. That approach will end up failing, as it always has, but we need to make our leaders understand that this is not something that will be tolerated in today's Canada. Our diversity is our strength. To once again quote the former prime minister, "A society which emphasizes uniformity is one which creates intolerance and hate".

[*English*]

I requested an additional 30 seconds to make this final remark, so I am grateful for the indulgence.

I am tremendously optimistic for the future. I see that my daughters' generation already thinks very differently about these challenges, and it brings me hope. Politics has taught me that progress is not linear. It happens when enough good people fight long enough and hard enough to make things right.

The most important lessons are the ones we learn again and again, and that surprised me. The advice I have for my daughters, despite all my experiences, boils down to what my parents taught me, which is to be thankful for all we have been given and to return the favour by lifting others up. Believe in yourself, but remember it is not all about you. Be kind to others and understand that those without kindness are the ones who need it the most. Finally, in politics, as in life, try to leave things a little better than they were found.

I hope, colleagues, that in our service we left our community and country better off for our efforts. I am confident that those who sit in this chamber and those who will fill these seats long after we are gone will do the same.

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• (1920)

Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Mr. Chair, for almost 16 years, I have had the honour of speaking in the House of Commons chamber to represent the interests of Canadians. As the adage goes, all good things must come to an end. On the day of the next election, I bid you and my colleagues adieu and express my appreciation for the many individuals who have made it possible for me to serve as a member of Parliament and to serve my country.

First and foremost, my thanks go to my amazing and beautiful bride of almost 40 years, Almut Sweet. She has had to tolerate too many absences, interruptions and stress that, unfortunately, our partners must endure for us to be present in Ottawa. In Almut's case, she also endured two cancer surgeries and the tragic loss of our daughter, Lara. My sweetheart not only has my undying love, but also gratitude and deep respect for her willingness to sacrifice for my service and for our country.

My next thanks go to all my children, who, along with my wife, suffered many absences due to my being here in Ottawa. All of them have been so gracious. They always referred to my absences as a mission they approved of and were thankful for my work representing our country. I am so looking forward to spending more time with them, more time with Theresa, Christopher, Lucian, Reuben, D.C., and grandchildren, far too many names to name.

Next are the constituents of Flamborough—Glanbrook, but also those of Waterdown, Westdale, West Hamilton, Dundas, and Ancaster, whom I served for quite some time as well. I ask them to accept my heartfelt thanks for placing their trust and confidence in me to represent them here in this House of Commons. Their vote gave me a privilege very few Canadians have been able to experience throughout the history of our great nation, and for that they have my sincere, undying gratitude.

I hope my colleagues forgive me, because one of the missions we had in my office was to launch young people into successful careers in politics. My staff over the years, and the list is long, deserve to be named: Doug, Carolyn, Diane, Steph, Laurie, Erin, Justin, Kesha, Michael, Katherine, Rebecca, Justin, Jacob, James, Nathan, Rachel, Monica, Alicia, Sandra, Lewan, Chris, Jacob, Colin, Tracey and presently Patricia, Liz, James, Simon, Denise, Alex and Dan.

All members should readily admit that without hard-working, dedicated, patient staff, they would accomplish very little. I thank team Sweet for all they did to make me look good, and more importantly for all they do for Canadians. They are a gift to our nation.

As I just said, all of my staff are amazing, but there are very special staff who believed in me and were with me from the very beginning, and they deserve special mention. Doug and Carolyn Brown took on the task of shepherding me through the process of establishing a constituency office, and by so doing they set the standard remarkably high for all future staff. Their professional, mature approach to constituent service meant that we had a stellar reputation throughout the entire greater city of Hamilton and consequently were able to successfully sort out the problems of thousands of people, everywhere from rescuing Canadians from despot dictatorships around the world to those dreaded CRA files. I am in Doug

and Carolyn's debt for the rest of my days for their service and friendship. Canada is a better nation for them.

Stef Rose was my first legislative assistant, who had such a drive to excel that he interviewed many senior staff on the Hill to make sure he was able to serve in his capacity with excellence, and he sure did. Stef, three times, rewrote legislation for me that became one of the few private members' bills to pass with all-party support, the Fairness for Victims of Violent Offenders Act. He managed committee work and so much more, but ultimately always stood out because he was ready to go the extra mile. I am so happy that my friend Stef is where he always wanted to be, and Canada is a better and safer place due to his efforts.

Somehow I convinced a fine man named Dan Muise that I was the candidate who needed to be elected to serve Canadians alongside Stephen Harper. Dan started his career as a special assistant to Jean Charest, when he was elected as a member of this House.

• (1925)

The riding was known as Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale in those days, and, beginning in 2004, Dan helped me with virtually every aspect of my parliamentary career, including when I was able to dump my frustrations on him after particularly rough days.

Dan has served this country in ways that many will never know, and he will never be adequately rewarded for it, yet Dan is not the kind of person who does what he does for reward. His dedication to Canada is his love for the same. I thank Dan for his service, hard work and dedication, and for our deep friendship.

Then there are our best friends who help us keep our feet on the ground and bring us a better perspective to life than what we get within this thing we call the Ottawa bubble. They are the ones who helped us early in life, and who know who we are and who we are becoming. Bob Baxter and Reid Meyers have both departed this world for eternity, but they mentored a young man who had a fleet of tow trucks back in 1982 and encouraged him to grow in character, intellect and spirituality.

My best friends, Larry and Leslie Brune, have assisted me and my family in every imaginable way. Their generosity, hospitality, dedication and kindness are, in no small way, one of the substantial reasons I am here today. These two individuals I speak of have quietly helped hundreds of people, and they have done it so humbly and quietly that few know the amazing impact they have had on large groups of Americans and Canadians. Their selfless efforts to serve others is so great, the human language falters at trying to explain their love for others.

I extend a special thanks to my friend Franc, a reserve officer in the Israel Defense Forces, who always welcomed me to Israel. He is such a good friend and brother, who I get to see so seldom. I wish peace and protection to Franc and his family.

My thanks go to so many supporters and donors who gave of their time, their talents and their money to make sure I could continue to wage successive successful campaigns. Their assistance is so important in our democracy, and it often goes unnoticed, but they really are the engine behind every candidate and determine their ultimate success. I thank them.

I would now like to give a message to my colleagues. All of us in this chamber should reflect often on the magnitude of responsibility we have and the fact that we live in a nation that still, for the most part, elects individuals on their merit and not on their social status or their wealth, as we see in some other nations. We are blessed to live in a country where voters determine the outcome of an election and not individual political parties with the right to establish lists for voters or a regime of evil elites who tell voters how they should vote. This is a rich gift that has been carefully protected by past generations. It has been fought for with Canadian blood in past conflicts.

No matter which party members are from in this chamber, their individual responsibility as a member is to guard this cherished institution. That is exactly why we are obliged to swear an oath to Her Majesty the Queen of Canada. We do not protect this institution because we are privileged. We guard and protect this institution because this chamber is where critical issues that concern individual Canadians are debated and resolved.

I thought I had a good handle on what I was just talking about until the evening we were to vote on whether we would sustain our troops in Afghanistan. I knew the issues, and I knew the good work our troops had accomplished. I knew about the young girls and women who had never experienced freedom until our troops arrived.

However, when the bells began to ring, the weight of what we were about to vote on reached a much higher level of severity than it had in my entire life. I realized that my vote would not only allow a continued effort by our troops to accomplish their good work, but it also meant that our young men and women were going to continue to be placed in harm's way, and it meant Canadians would die.

There were many poignant times in my career that were transformative and gave me a deeper clarity regarding the magnitude of our responsibilities, but sustaining our troops in one of the most dangerous areas of Afghanistan, areas other countries had abandoned, was the most sobering. I encourage all of my colleagues to think for themselves, bearing in mind the oath we have taken, and their concerns for their constituents and all Canadians.

• (1930)

Political parties are great institutions in and of themselves, and I am very grateful for my party, the Conservative Party of Canada, and my band of brothers and sisters, my colleagues. Consequently, I want to encourage all members from all parties to, yes, be a team player but also be ready to think through all issues and steward

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their own integrity. Members want that confidence when they look in the mirror every day, that they are their own person.

Some of my colleagues have become good friends, and I will keep them long past politics.

The member for Niagara West is such a good friend. He phoned me up after I was elected and said, "Come on up here. I'm going to show you the ropes so you can hit the ground running and you're not going to have to figure everything out for yourself". He has been profoundly generous, and I want to give Dino my gratitude.

The member for Brantford—Brant is a great gentleman, and I have appreciated his character and candour. When we have colleagues we can disagree with, debate and still be friends, it is priceless.

Dave Van Kesteren retired before the last election, but for all the time he served with me and was my seatmate, we became great friends and sorted out a lot of important issues, and we had a lot of fun.

The member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame made our trip to London and Scotland a special treat as did the member for Gatineau in joining me for the most scenic jog in my life down the River Thames in London.

For almost 15 years, I served with the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston on the Subcommittee on International Human Rights and with two fine Liberal members, Mario Silva and Irwin Cotler. We worked together to stand up for people who were being jailed, persecuted, tortured and killed. We were able to save many lives working together. I am so grateful for their co-operation and work with me.

Finally, some have asked me why I am leaving Parliament. Well, the truth is, I am not fully well. I want to take this opportunity to encourage others who are not well to get help.

I thought a lot since January, when I made the decision not to run in the next election, about what caused my mental health jaundice. I do not know if it was the four years of incarceration in a juvenile institution when I was 12. It may have been when I was attacked by a knife-wielding assailant in Lockport, New York; or the betrayal of business partners when I was a young businessman; or losing two children, one who died in my hands while I was trying to deliver her and another who took her own life. Maybe the terrorist attack here on Parliament Hill played a role and the too many funerals I planned, because I was always looked to as the guy who could handle it. The fifteen years of hearing the worst stories of human suffering in the human rights committee, I know, played a role. Likely, the entire lot played a role as did the current draconian lockdowns.

We should all respect that everyone has a limit, and that it is different for everyone. Thankfully, there are many who have greater limits than us, like many who are in the Canadian Forces, and for those individuals, we are so grateful.

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All of us need to be conscious of what our limit is and ensure that we get relief and help when needed well before it becomes crippling. This is what I am doing, and I encourage all those who can hear my voice and need help to seek it and be relentless to get what they need. They need not feel any shame. We all need help sometimes.

I also plead with those who do not currently need help to be patient and help others. Just this past weekend, my friend, Nicholas Lauwers, a psychotherapist himself, was there for me and helped me to get back on track just by being willing to listen. I thank Nick for that.

My final but most important thanks goes to the Lord Jesus Christ. The reconstruction of my life that happened after I made a commitment to Christ is what animates every aspect of my life. Of all I am grateful for, my gratitude to God is far beyond all the other thanksgivings I can give.

On the Centre Block arches are three scriptures, “Where there is no vision, the people perish; “Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king’s son”; and on the other, “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea”.

● (1935)

These are words that guided principled people as imperfect as they were to build a nation that people from the four corners of the world want to get to, to call their home. People are not staying up all night thinking they have to plot and scheme on how to get to Iran. They are not saying if they could just get to Russia, everything would be okay.

All around the world, people are plotting, scheming and thinking if they could just get to Canada.

May God continue to bless Canada and make it glorious and free.

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is to my hon. colleagues, my dear constituents and supporters, my hard-working team and my beloved family and friends.

[Translation]

I saw this day coming for many months, but I have been feeling somewhat sad about it.

[English]

For over five and a half years, I have had the privilege and honour to sit in this House and represent the good people of Miramichi—Grand Lake. I am very proud of what our government and I have been able to accomplish for our riding, but of course, there is still a long list of more things that need to be done. However, that will be passed on to our next Liberal MP from Miramichi—Grand Lake to pursue and deliver because today I wish to announce that I will not be the candidate for the next general federal election, but I will remain their MP until such a call is made.

[Translation]

It is always risky to thank people and acknowledge their work, because most of the time we end up forgetting people we really should have thanked. I hope that, if I forget anyone, they will forgive me. I will always be very grateful to them.

[English]

At this stage of my life, six years is really but a small portion of the time I have been up on my feet. Most of my life I have spent in my community with my family, building our business and being involved in local, provincial and national organizations.

The voice I brought to this House was not one of an acclaimed politician or one with tremendous legal or political science background, which I respect and admire, and such expertise is absolutely necessary in the House. No, my voice, which I believe is just as important, was one of rural, smart, hard-working people, including our vibrant indigenous communities.

I am glad that I was able to have it heard in so many different ways, such as with the privilege of sitting as a member of the fisheries and oceans committee and the agriculture standing committee, which I had the opportunity and honour to chair throughout my time as MP.

I was also able to have my voice heard in the many conversations and meetings with our cabinet ministers, my caucus colleagues and as chair of the New Brunswick caucus with my provincial colleagues.

Finally, I had the great privilege to have my voice heard by the right hon. Prime Minister, who I want to thank personally for putting his trust in me and for his strong support and confidence during my time as member of Parliament for Miramichi—Grand Lake. He made many visits to my riding in times of crisis to provide commitment and support, such as during the 2017 ice storm and the dark days of the payroll centre in my riding, but he also dropped in many times just to meet and have conversations with the people of Miramichi—Grand Lake.

Thank you so much, Prime Minister. Thank you for your guidance and for carrying us through this awful pandemic.

I must also recognize that I have learned and benefited so much from the many conversations and debates with all members of the House, whose friendships I will cherish always.

● (1940)

[Translation]

Our government accomplished some great things for our country and for my riding of Miramichi—Grand Lake. Even though there is still a lot more to do, our region experienced a great period of economic and social growth during my term.

[English]

I would like to list a few of those many accomplishments that we have been able to achieve in my riding. Of course, again, the payroll centre, which had just been opened by the previous government in my riding and, everyone will agree, was totally dysfunctional. We were able to secure and stabilize it with an additional 400 local federal jobs in my riding and proper investments to fix it and make it work.

Just a few of the many investments the government and I were able to secure are the refurbishing of the Minto town hall in my riding; Chipman water sewage treatment; the Chatham wharf; the new Napan Agricultural Show building; the new Miramichi Airport terminal; the auditorium, the hall dedicated to Lisa LeBlanc in my community of Rogersville; the roof for the Neguac Sportplex; the refurbishment of the Tom Donovan Arena in Renous; the new Anderson Bridge; the new water system for the Village of Doaktown; an elementary school for our indigenous community of Elsipogtog; water and sewage for the villages of Neguac, Minto and Rogersville; and the renovation of Kouchibouguac National Park.

On the strategic economic front, my riding also benefited greatly from millions of dollars invested in our fishery sector with processing-plant upgrades, small craft harbours and stability funding for our fishers. There were millions of dollars of investment in our primary sector, in such areas as peat moss, the forestry sector, agriculture and also great investment in our summer and winter tourism industry.

On the social front, unprecedented investment in the Canada child benefit brings over \$3 million to over 5,000 families in Miramichi—Grand Lake every month, along with our increased new horizon program and disability accessibility program to name a few. The doubling of the Canada summer job program, mental health investments, housing and immigration programs are all record high investments.

Although much remains to be done, our steady work with our first nations in housing, clean drinking water, language and culture teaching, and work on truth and reconciliation has made great strides. Of course, I am so proud of our unwavering commitment for the environment, whether it is our oceans protection plan, poluter-pay legislation and our plastic bans, and also our commitments to net-zero emissions by 2050. These measures will secure a livable planet for the next generation.

I also want to take the time to thank the mayors, council, businesses and local leaders from all communities in my riding for all their hard work and great co-operation.

[Translation]

I now want to take the opportunity to personally acknowledge and thank my office team: Ashley, Hannah, Roger, Bertrand, Christine, Marie-Paule and Peggy, as well as my former staffer Josée and the late Louise.

I want to say a big thank you to them on behalf of myself and the people of Miramichi—Grand Lake who received absolutely professional service when they knocked on our door for help. I want my office staff to know that they helped a lot of people.

I also want to thank my campaign team and all my constituents in Miramichi—Grand Lake to whom I owe the privilege of serving in the House.

[English]

I also want to thank the House of Commons team from security to cafeteria workers, and from pages to all the support staff. I want them to know they are appreciated, indispensable and I really want to thank them from the heart. I have had great conversations with

them and enjoyed my sidebars with security and everyone else. It was just great.

Finally, I want to thank the people who mean so much to me in my life and who have sacrificed a lot for me. To my daughter Vicky, her husband Gerard, my son Derek, and Sarah, and to my grandchildren Tristan, James and Joelle, I thank them and say, “pépère is back”. To my mom, my eight brothers and sisters and their extended family, I thank them for their support.

I also want to inform this House that I was not the only one serving the good people of Miramichi—Grand Lake. My wife Lise also accompanied me to so many events and took care of so many things for me so that I could do my job. She also served. Just a note to the Ethics Commissioner, she was not on the payroll, so it is fine. Her relentless work in keeping our family and business together is simply amazing. I can never thank her enough. She has been my rock, my safe harbour and my eternal love. I will say, and I hope she is okay with it, “I am back”.

● (1945)

[Translation]

Mr. Simon Marcell (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, here I am back again for the third time after what I thought was my last speech. If there is no election, then I will come back and give another one.

In 2015, I was elected as an MP. I was 30 years old and I had young children. I travelled back and forth for two years in order to make sure that I did not miss any part of my children's lives, and if I had the chance to do it all again, I would. My goal was always to give my children a better world and, for me, that meant giving them a country that is not Canada, but Quebec.

I have always been proud to be the member for Mirabel, but I was never proud of the land that was stolen by the federal government. The federal government took 97,000 acres of land in my riding, land that was owned by people I know, neighbours. I am proud to be the member for Mirabel and to have stood up for those people.

I thank my children for waiting for me so often. When I left home earlier, they knew I was coming here to give my farewell speech. They were looking forward to my return, but I will not see them until tomorrow morning because they will be asleep when I get home. That is okay. I thank my wife, Johanie, who has always been by my side, who has helped me and who believes in our cause.

I am not the Prime Minister, so I will not start crying, but now that I am done with my praise, it is time for a little criticism.

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Canada is its own biggest problem. It claims to be a progressive state, and it jumps at the chance to write that into treaties and laws, but deep down, it is an archaic state ruled by a monarchy.

Canada's progressive message is that we are not all born equal under the law because royals are better than mere mortals and inherit their power as their birthright. That goes against democracy and everything this House claims to stand for. I understand tradition, but the metal in the House mace alone is so valuable that it could support a family for a year.

Canada claims to be a champion of human rights. It boasts all over the world about saving widows and orphans, but it is not even capable of providing clean water for the indigenous communities it is responsible for within its own borders. There are third-world conditions right here on Canadian soil. It is happening right there in front of them and they do not even see it.

Canada also created peacekeeping and boasts about its peacekeeping missions around the world. However, at the same time, the arms deals it signed with countries in the Middle East were supplying the Jeeps being used to kill civilians. Canada may be a peacekeeping country, but it is complicit with the totalitarian states that are decimating their populations.

Canada also claims to be an egalitarian state, but it refuses to enact legislation to combat tax havens and recover all kinds of lost tax revenue that could be put towards health transfers. Canada refuses to do this. That is the ethical problem. Another ethical problem is that Canada is a tax haven for mining companies because the laws do not apply.

Canada still claims it is green and says it is pro-environment, and it wants everyone to be well and for everyone to be able to breathe. It says it will plant two billion trees and that that is great. On the other hand, it is a petro-state that finances oil companies and the energies of the past, but that does not finance those of tomorrow. Quebec is greener than Canada, because we pay with our taxes.

Canada claims to be strong and unified, and says that the Canadian identity is great. However, the Canadian identity is fragile. It is a giant with feet of clay. Albertans are proud to be Albertans. Quebecers are proud to be Quebecers. Pierre Falardeau said to topple monuments to see the worms squirm. That is the problem.

Canada claims to be a democratic country. However, it stole the referendum of 1995—so says the Gomery commission—not to mention the sponsorship scandal and the irregularities Canada has introduced into a democratic election.

● (1950)

Canada also claims to be at the forefront of workers' rights, and yet this country cannot even pass preventive withdrawal legislation to protect women or legislation to protect the right to strike. There is no anti-scab legislation in Canada.

Canada's history was built on the conquest of indigenous peoples, on the will to assimilate them. Canada's founding father, John A. Macdonald, was an inveterate racist, although the member for Ahuntsic-Cartierville says he was a decent guy.

In order to create an identity for itself, Canada has usurped all the cultural symbols of Quebecers, who used to be called "Canayens". These symbols include the maple leaf, which hardly grows anywhere else in Canada, our music, the lyrics of the national anthem, the beaver, which Canada does not have, and even poutine. Can we agree that there is no edible poutine west of the Ottawa River? One thing is certain. The two cultural icons that remain Canadian and were never taken from anyone else are the bloody Rockies and the Toronto hockey team that just cannot win.

To quote Mononé Serge, "Canada is not my country". They said it in English so everyone would understand. I am a separatist MP, a member of the Bloc Québécois. I have been a separatist all my life. I want Quebec to be its own country. *Vive le Québec libre*.

[English]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I leave this chamber for what may be the last time as the MP for Sudbury, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on my time here in the House and the dynamic community of Sudbury that I represent.

● (1955)

[Translation]

As everyone here knows, when you go into politics, you do not do it alone. It is above all a family decision. I have been honoured to serve the people of Sudbury with the support of my wife Lyne and my children Mylène, Henri and Théo. I am proud of them and I love them.

Yesterday was my 24th wedding anniversary. I want to thank Lyne for her continuous support and for sharing this unforgettable experience with me, as we journey through life together.

[English]

I also want to thank my team, hard-working supporters and all the voters who live in Sudbury for their ongoing confidence in me. The help I have received along the way, along with the friends I have made and the lessons I have learned, will stay with me forever. I thank all of them. The list is quite long, but I would like to thank Mike and Marie-Eve, who have been there with me since day one, and my team, with Funmibi, Lynn, Sophie and Bernard. I want to thank the Prime Minister for his confidence in appointing me Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources. It was a post I held for nearly three years.

As a member of Parliament, I have seen the amazing work that can be accomplished on various committees when partisanship is put aside. Yes, that does happen in the House. When we are all sitting here in the House on Wednesdays before the doors open, we all get together and sing *O Canada*. It is unfortunate that Canadians do not witness that most members of Parliament are proud Canadians first and members of political parties second.

I have also seen in this chamber the stark divisions of partisanship and the lasting damage caused by the denial of obvious facts, such as climate change and institutional racism faced by Canadians every day.

[Translation]

We have a duty as members to show all Canadians that we have learned from our own 153-year history and that we must all respect our differences. We must show that fear of our different languages, cultures, religions, races or sexual orientations has no place in our society.

[English]

This year has been very difficult for all Canadians, and I know the work of this government has made a very positive difference in Canadians' lives. I know my riding of Sudbury has been very well served by the programs we have put in place, and I am both honoured and humbled to have played a role in that.

[Translation]

To me, the role of the House and members is to listen to Canadians, to work and find the best way to help them. Having listened to Canadians and because of the changes that have been made since 2015, I have a lot of hope for Canada. Let me explain why.

[English]

First, I am hopeful because of the ingenuity of Canadians. Our governments must continue to foster the opportunities that this amazing Canadian talent offers us. Let me start with my riding of Sudbury. Our lakes were all polluted 40 years ago. The landscape was black rock and the trees were decimated because of pollution from mining. Ingenuity was building the tallest superstack in the world so that the pollution would go farther. We then planted 14 million trees on that black rock. Now, because of research, ingenuity, regulations and community, we have reduced the sulphur dioxide by 98% and all of our lakes have fish. We can drink the water, and the superstack is coming down in the next years.

We are ground zero for the environment and the economy going hand in hand.

[Translation]

Sudbury has become an international research centre.

[English]

In early 2016, Sudbury's SNOLAB, a world-class public-private research consortium located two kilometres underground in Vale's Creighton mine, and its world-class team of researchers, led by Art McDonald, were awarded the Nobel Prize for physics.

In addition, many of Sudbury's mining supply companies are leading the way in electric underground vehicle technology, and new battery and energy storage tech is being pioneered in Sudbury at an industrial scale.

The mining industry is also leading the way in first nations economic partnerships. The Côté Gold Project, for example, in my neighbouring riding of Nickel Belt, which is well served in this House by my friend, the MP for Nickel Belt, includes two neighbouring first nations communities, the Mattagami First Nation and the Flying Post First Nation, as partners. In Sudbury, Wahnapiatae and Atikameksheng first nations are also partners in the mining projects.

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We must continue to support this ingenuity, and this gives me reasons for hope for scientific advancements, economic opportunities and jobs in Canada.

[Translation]

I have hope because Canadians want more to be done in the fight against climate change.

[English]

In September 2018, a young student named Sophia Mathur reached out to my office in Sudbury and asked me to participate in the first-ever Fridays for Future student strike in Sudbury. From then until now, Sophia and a dynamic group of young friends have organized more than 70 events, including sign waving, singing, Bollywood dancing and lots and lots of advocacy. These inspiring young people are leading by example, and there are so many of them in communities across our beautiful country. Sophia's message to me and to all of us in this chamber is simple: We can lead now on these important issues, or we can get out of the way.

With the price on pollution, an electric vehicle battery plan, a hydrogen plan, a Canadian minerals plan, planting two billion trees, clean fuel standards, clean-tech innovation supports, environmental accountability legislation and many more policies, we are on our way to reach our carbon targets of 2030 and 2050.

[Translation]

Thanks to Canadians like Sophia, I have hope for the future.

[English]

I am also hopeful because Canadians realize that now, more than ever, learning the truth and reconciling with indigenous nations is a priority.

Another memory I have is from early 2016. I was invited to Whitefish River First Nation in northern Ontario to visit with the children of that nation. There I met Chief Shining Turtle, who filled me in on his nation's needs. He told me about his nation's water system, in desperate need of an upgrade to meet growing demand. He told me about health care in his nation, the school in his nation and how some families were being left behind. He told me his nation had waited years, sometimes decades, to have those addressed.

Working together, over time we tackled these issues. I returned to his nation in 2018 to announce an investment in the Waubetek centre of excellence for indigenous minerals development, led by Dawn Madahbee Leach. I took the opportunity to visit with the chief and saw how quickly improvements to the water system, which had been mired in red tape for years, had been made.

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I saw first-hand how vital and effective Jordan's principle is to first nations communities, through the experience of children able to overcome health issues and attend school in Whitefish Lake First Nation for the first time. To them, I say *chi-meegwetch*.

With over 100 boil water advisories lifted, many nations recently connected to the grid, unprecedented training opportunities for first nations and unprecedented partnerships with natural resource projects, we are on our way to learning the truth and have started the path toward reconciliation. I am hopeful that, given the immensity of this path, this House, regardless of political stripe, will not waver and will continue to follow the path along with indigenous peoples.

• (2000)

[Translation]

I am very hopeful that we can have a strong, bilingual Canada. Francophone minority communities have asked for investments in their cultural, educational and community infrastructure. I have seen the results of these investments in Sudbury, with the construction of Place des Arts du Grand Sudbury, a project spearheaded by Paulette Gagnon and Regroupement des organismes culturels de Sudbury.

We will have our community arts centre and several community organizations will ensure the viability and the vitality of our community. I have seen this happen over and over across Canada in the past five years. I am therefore hopeful.

[English]

I especially want to thank the voters of Sudbury for placing their trust in me, twice. It has truly been one of the greatest honours in my life being Sudbury's voice in Ottawa. I will be forever grateful.

Sudbury is a microcosm of Canada. For the majority anglophone population and over 45,000 French-speaking residents, Sudbury has the third-largest francophone community outside of Quebec and a strong indigenous population. Sudbury was built on the backs of waves of immigrants from Italy, Finland, Poland, Ukraine, Greece, Croatia, Serbia and many more, and more recently, a strong South Asian, Syrian and African contingent. Members can see I am proud to be a Sudburian.

I grew up in a working-class home in Kapuskasing.

[Translation]

My father Jean was a welder at the Spruce Falls mill for 40 years. We were a foster family and after welcoming 18 children over five years into our home, my mother Paulette got her high school diploma and her bachelor's degree in social work at Laurentian and Université de Hearst while managing the household, together with my father, for me, my sister Roxanne and my brother Denis. They instilled in me the values of loyalty and hard work, and these values will always be part of me. I am proud to be their son.

[English]

I will miss my amazing colleagues in the House. I really will. It has been an honour to serve my constituents and Canadians with them.

In conclusion, because of the inspiration of Chief Shining Turtle; because of Sophia Mathur and the Fridays for Future gang, Paulette Gagnon and René Larocque; because of the world-class people attracted to Sudbury and Canada, and projects like SNOLAB and industrial battery technology, I am eternally optimistic about our future. It is because of all of them that I leave this chamber more hopeful than I entered it, hopeful that Canada and Canadians will continue to meet the challenges of the future, and hopeful that this chamber and the wonderful Canadians who sit in it will continue to lead the way.

Ms. Mumilaq Qaqqaq (Nunavut, NDP): Mr. Speaker, *matna*.

Every time I walk onto the House of Commons grounds and speak in these chambers, I am reminded every step of the way I do not belong here.

I have never felt safe or protected in my position, especially within the House of Commons, often having pep talks with myself in the elevator or taking a moment in the bathroom stall to maintain my composure. When I walk through these doors not only am I reminded of the clear colonial house on fire I am willingly walking into, I am already in survival mode.

Since being elected, I expect to be stopped by security at my workplace. I have had security jog after me down hallways, nearly put their hands on me and racially profile me as a member of Parliament. I know what to do in these situations. My life in Canada, and especially through this experience, has taught me many things. As a brown woman, I do not move too quickly or suddenly, do not raise my voice, do not make a scene, maintain eye contact and do not hide my hands.

Every Inuk has survival mode. We have to. Not two generations ago, survival mode meant endurance of extreme temperatures and finding food throughout the winter. Now survival mode means being able to see that warmth in shelter and affordability in livelihood, but being denied it at the hands of the federal government.

The federal institution needs to change its own policies and procedures to reflect reality instead of creating barriers for people like me. I should not be afraid of going into work. No one should be afraid of going into work. It is possible to create change. It can be started here in the House of Commons and reflected in Canada. There is a refusal and unwillingness for change, not an inability to accomplish it.

People like me do not belong here in the federal institution. I am a human being who wants to use this institution to help people, but the reality is that this institution and country have been created off the backs, trauma and displacement of indigenous peoples. Even if we are told we should run, we still face huge barriers. Young people have been told they are not experienced enough, not ready to lead. Women have been told to sit pretty and listen. Disabled individuals have been shown they are not even worth the conversation. Inuit kill themselves at the highest rate in the country. We are facing a suicide epidemic and this institution refuses to care.

During my time in this chamber, I have heard so many pretty words, like reconciliation, diversity and inclusion. I have been called courageous, brave and strong by people outside of my party. However, let me be honest, brutally honest. Nice words with no action hurt when they are uttered by those with power over the federal institution who refuse to take action. The legacy this institution continues to not only maintain but to build and fuel is nothing to take pride in. People in power have choices and consistently choose priorities that uphold systems of oppression, leaving babies sick in mouldy homes and parents missing their passed-on children because these powerful individuals do not think change is worth the money.

Recently I asked a minister what he would do in my shoes. If his riding had the highest rates of suicide, with the most homes in need of repair, if women and girls were going missing in his community and children were being taken into foster care without regard for their well-being, how would he feel? I asked if the minister would change his answer if I told him to keep waiting. He could not answer me. He said he would never even try to place himself in my shoes. That is exactly what the problem is. Inuit have been telling those with the power and ability to make change to try and survive in their shoes for one day, one week, one month. They could not.

● (2005)

Maybe it is impossible for ministers to understand what we go through every day, but I am urging them and telling them to listen to us, believe us and do something about it. When we tell them to act now, they need to act now. If they do understand, then shame on them, because if they do understand how much this hurts, they understand how deep it cuts. It would be easier for me to be told that I am wrong and that they disagree than to be told that I am right and I am courageous but there is no room in their budget for the basic human rights that so many others take for granted.

I do not belong here, but my presence, I hope, is starting to crack the foundations of this very federal institution that started colonizing Inuit barely 70 years ago. I realize that this is difficult for some members to hear, but it is the reality and the truth. This place was built on the oppression of indigenous peoples, people like my grandfather, who was born and raised on the land but was forcibly relocated to a settlement that was financed and built by the federal institution.

Our history is stained with blood. It is the blood of children, youth, adults and elders. It is time to face the scales of justice. On one side we have a mountain of suffering, and whenever the government gives us a grain of sand of support, it seems to think the trauma from our past has been rectified and that somehow it de-

serves a pat on the back. However, it will take a mountain of support to even begin the healing process. As long as these halls echo with empty promises instead of real action, I will not belong here.

Although I may not belong in this institution, I do belong in my party. The NDP has always been a party committed to uplifting the voices of all those, of all different backgrounds, who are ignored by the federal institution.

I would like to thank my leader, the member for Burnaby South, for listening to me and making me feel safe and comfortable to voice what I needed to. Members from other parties have come to me asking me to advocate for an issue their party refused to touch, but I never felt muzzled by the NDP. I could never join another party and I am a proud New Democrat.

I thank my colleagues from New Westminster—Burnaby, North Island—Powell River and especially Hamilton Centre for always having my back. Without my NDP colleagues I would not have such a great platform that is true in the want to do more, to do better and to do right.

I would also like to thank my number one supports, my mother and father, Pia and Jimmy, and my brother Lars, for everything from day one.

I give a huge shout-out to my staff. I could not have survived without them. With all the things that have come out of my office, everything that I am so proud of, I know that I could not have done this without them. I am so grateful for them.

Of course, ultimately, from the bottom of my heart, I thank Inuit and Nunavummiut who believe in me and support me. The encouraging messages have meant more than people will know. I would like to thank Pauktuutit for always standing up for Inuit women and girls like me and for speaking truth to power, even when it is inconvenient.

I will always fight for the human rights of indigenous peoples in Nunavut and across the country. I believe that we are living through a shift in this country and Canadians are starting to wake up to the reality. I am looking forward to a time when people like me can belong here, a time when we can be here. I hope another young person, Inuk person, woman or all three will follow in my footsteps and continue pushing this institution to support indigenous peoples in Canada.

I have shown the nation and the world that impossible is possible, that hope can grow where it is purposely put out and that if we work together and use our voices we can influence real change. I will always believe politics can look, feel and be different. It can, it has and it has started. We will keep it going, and we all must ensure that it does.

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● (2010)

Ms. Kate Young (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise in the House of Commons today to give my farewell speech.

While I am very hopeful this will not be the last time I will speak in the House, I cannot be certain. Minority governments tend to be that way, unpredictable, and so I will take this opportunity to officially say goodbye.

This is not easy. Leaving something as important as this never is, but making the decision to get into politics was not easy either.

When I first started to consider running for politics in 2014, many of my friends and colleagues thought I had momentarily lost my mind, but I knew I had not. I knew in my bones that Canadians wanted change, and I wanted to be a part of that change. My only regret now is that I did not consider running for the Liberals much sooner, because it has been an absolute honour to represent the people of London West in the House, and I am proud of what we have accomplished.

When I was first elected in 2015, my twin grandsons, Harrison and Francis, were only two years old. Now they are eight years old, and I have decided to write my farewell speech with them in mind, hoping that one day they will watch this speech and understand its full meaning.

My memories of the past six years are a blur of highs and lows, of accomplishments that I am very proud of and of bitter heartache, especially after the recent horrific murder of four of my constituents, the Afzaal family, who were killed while walking along a street in London West on a Sunday night, killed simply because they were Muslim.

This terrorist attack has served to remind our community that we are not immune to hate. This hate manifested in destroying a wonderful Muslim family and leaving their nine-year-old son, Fayez, in hospital, wounded both physically and emotionally. His grandmother, Talat; mother, Madiha; father, Salman; and his 15-year-old big sister, Yumna were brutally taken from him. It is such a loss, all because of hate.

However, Londoners quickly turned hate into love. Thousands of Londoners from every culture and faith filled the streets on Friday night to pay their respects to the Afzaal family, who are forever in our hearts. Many people outside of Canada expressed shock that something like this could happen here. We are supposed to be a country that welcomes diversity with open arms, diversity is our strength, but heinous acts like this remind us how fragile that strength is. Many people in our community feel that if it can happen in London, Ontario, it can happen anywhere.

This has been an incredibly tough time for everyone in Canada. Just two weeks ago, we learned the details about the unmarked graves of 215 indigenous children at a former Kamloops residential school. These children were taken from their families and never came home. Our hearts ache as we are reminded, once again, of our callous disregard for indigenous people. So much grief to face and it would be too easy to say “Well, that happened years ago; that wouldn't happen today”, but we would be fooling ourselves. We

need to reconcile our pride and our country with what we have done.

I want my grandsons to learn about Canada's true, blemished history, because we must face the truth before we can understand what it means to be Canadians. I urge all Canadians to use this upcoming Canada Day as an opportunity to reflect on how Canada can be a more loving, more educated and more accepting country.

As a child growing up in the 1960s, I was so proud of Canada as we celebrated our 100th birthday; 1967, what a glorious year. My dad drove our family to Montreal for Expo 67. My father was a new Canadian citizen and he was overflowing with love for his newfound home. What he did not know, and what we did not know, was the cost that indigenous people paid so we could be proud of our country.

I cannot sit in the House without feeling the weight of decisions made by members who sat here in the past, who somehow thought they were doing the right thing, taking children away from their families to force them to be assimilated to our way of thinking because they believed they were right, and they were so very wrong. What a shame, what a national shame, and I am so very sorry.

● (2015)

Despite all of this sadness, Harrison and Francis, I am proud to be Canadian, and I am so proud to have had the honour to sit in this House with good people and pass good laws. To be a member of Parliament during a pandemic is not something any of us expected, but despite this challenging time, we have accomplished so much. I do not have time to list everything, but I do want to talk about some of the areas I was most involved with.

I am very proud to have pushed our government to earmark \$30 million to support childhood cancer research. Too many children are dying from cancer, and we need to do more research to determine how to treat them, so they can live long, healthy lives.

I am proud to have co-sponsored a study on indigenous housing in rural, urban and northern communities that will hopefully be a catalyst for changes that will ultimately see indigenous people get the housing they need and deserve.

People with disabilities have always been a focus of mine, even before I came into politics, and so I am proud of working to help pass the Accessible Canada Act through the House and the Senate. This act will pave the way for a more accessible Canada for this and future generations.

How we treat our seniors has always been important to me, and it struck me as odd that we did not have a seniors minister who would focus on their issues. As members of the seniors caucus, we pushed to have the Prime Minister name a cabinet minister who would work solely on issues facing this group of Canadians. On this World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, I am proud that we have launched consultations on this growing issue.

We know how important non-profits are to the fabric of our society, and I have been a strong advocate for our government to do more for groups that support thousands of Canadians across the country. COVID-19 shone a light on all the good work this sector has been doing throughout Canada, and we cannot let them falter. Therefore, I am proud to be part of a working group of MPs that continues to push our government to strengthen our support for charities and non-profits. Our latest budget proposes to spend \$400 million to help charities and non-profits adapt and modernize, so they can better support the economic recovery in our communities.

As well, I am humbled to have been in place, serving as parliamentary secretary to science, when our government restored scientists to their rightful place in our decision-making. I want to thank the former science minister for always pushing to do what is right, no matter the obstacles. I thank the minister responsible for people with disabilities for showing me never to underestimate human potential, and also the economic development minister for teaching me that politics is filled with good people who want to do what is best for our country. I also want to say *merci* to her for pushing me to learn French. While I was not as successful as I had hoped to be, I do have a new-found appreciation for the French language, and I encourage anyone interested in getting into politics to start learning French now.

Of course, I want to thank my constituents of London West for putting their faith in me over the past six years. Going door to door and speaking to you about the things that really matter to you was a true joy, and I thank you for your support over the years. Whether you voted for me or not, thank you for allowing me to be your voice in Parliament.

Together, we have done great things for the city of London. We have opened our hearts, our arms and our homes to families from Syria, who are building new lives in our city. Construction of a new Maple Leaf Foods plant is under way, thanks to federal government funding. Sticking with the food industry, we are strong supporters of The Grove in London, an agriculture hub that will help us become a leader in agriculture manufacturing, and we cannot forget the millions of dollars in investments to the Greenway waste-water treatment plant, a critical infrastructure project for London West.

There are so many people to thank. To my family, who were supportive right from the beginning, my son, Billy; daughter-in-law, Kelly; daughter, Lauren; and soon-to-be son-in-law, Marc, you have been unwavering in your support and understanding. To my brother, Bill, and sister-in-law Johanna, thank you for reminding me how proud mom and dad would have been of what I have accomplished.

• (2020)

To my husband, Brian Meehan, thank you for being at my side as we ventured this path together. I cannot imagine doing this job

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without a supportive spouse, and he has been my cheerleader, a confidant and a shoulder to cry on. We really had no idea where it was going to take us, but he was there every step of the way and helped me make this final decision to step back.

I thank my staff, Devin Munro, Elaine Furie, Mack McGee, Pat Shanahan and Brendan Edge, for always being there for me and our constituents, to answer their calls and their emails day in and day out. It has not been easy, but they made me look good. I consider all of them friends and cannot imagine doing the job of an MP without their support.

Finally, I thank my grandsons, Harrison and Francis, who always find ways to make me smile. When I told Harrison that I was not going to run for re-election and that he would not have to go door-knocking with me again, he turned to me and said, “Does that mean you won’t be going back to the Liberal tower ever again?” The Liberal tower. When he came to Parliament Hill two years ago for what was officially our last sitting day in the old place before the renovations began, he would have walked up to what would have seemed like a massive tower, the Peace Tower. I was a Liberal, so in his mind it was the Liberal tower.

One day, when the renovations are complete, I hope to return to the Liberal tower with my grandsons and marvel at the history of it all. Maybe they will look up and say, “Grandma Kate tried her best to make Canada a better country for everyone”.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

• (2025)

Mr. Scott Duvall (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising today as the proud member of Parliament for my community of Hamilton Mountain. It has been my immense privilege and honour to serve my constituents over the past six years as their MP, and for nine years before that as their city councillor for Ward 7. I have spent more than 15 years serving the people of Hamilton Mountain as an elected representative. It has been an exciting and rewarding experience to hear from my community, advocate on their behalf and fight for Hamiltonians as their representative at city hall and here in Ottawa.

It is now time for me to leave room for others to continue this important and great work. After leaving politics, I plan on spending time with the people I love deeply and care about, and will volunteer to help seniors in need. I also want to work with my grandchildren in my shop to help them build things.

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This may be one of my last opportunities to speak in the House, so I want to take this opportunity to talk about what my caucus and I have championed over the six years during my time in Ottawa and what prompted me to run in the first place.

I came to Ottawa to fight for the people of Hamilton and for Canadian workers and pensioners. I am a proud steelworker, and my roots in the labour movement advocating for workers is why I am a New Democrat. Given my time at Stelco on the production line, then as a union steward and then as president of USW Local 5328, the labour movement has been my life. Protecting workers has been a priority during my time as an MP.

What we have seen in the House shows why we need a strong voice fighting for workers and for labour. We have seen several efforts by the government to legislate striking workers back to work and damage their ability to bargain for a fair deal with their employers. We have seen the government refuse to act on scab labour. We have seen the government refuse to protect the pensions of workers during bankruptcy and insolvency, and instead put big banks and investors at the top of the list. This is why it is so important that we continue to fight for workers in this place.

I went through the bankruptcy at Stelco back in the day, and I will never forget Judge Farley's advice, because I thought it was disgraceful how workers were being treated in the bankruptcy protection process. He said, "I don't like doing this, Mr. Duvall, and if you want to change it, go to Ottawa and change the legislation." That is another reason I am here.

We have all seen an effort by the government to create a two-tiered system of "junior seniors" and "senior seniors" by only giving an increase in OAS payments to some and not others. We have also watched them fail to act to protect single seniors and allow them to continue to pay substantially more taxes than seniors in a couple with the exact same income. During my time in Ottawa, it has been my priority to fight for seniors, to advocate for them and to push our government to do better.

In the House, I have sponsored a number of bills and pushed forward many initiatives. I have championed antiscab labour legislation aimed at protecting unions during labour disputes and preventing employers from undermining their collective bargaining. I have fought against government action to legislate striking workers back to work, taking away one of the strongest tools they have at their disposal to collectively bargain for a fair deal. I have pushed to protect the pensions of workers during bankruptcy and insolvency proceedings, and to make sure that payments of the unfunded portion of pension plans come before payments to big banks and investors.

I hope that before our Parliament is dissolved, quite possibly because of an unnecessary election call by the Liberals, we can pass through the House the best shot we have at protecting retirees and pensioners: Bill C-253.

During the pandemic, the time spent at home has reminded me of the importance of family and loved ones. As members of Parliament and as public servants, we are often forced to put our duties and responsibilities first and our families second. The toll this can have is immense, and I am so lucky to have had my family by my side the entire time.

I want to thank my wife Sherry; my kids, Laurie, Mandy and Megan; and my entire family and grandchildren. They have given me so much support and have made many sacrifices that have allowed me to do this important work and serve our community. I am so excited to spend more time at home with Sherry, and hope she will be excited to have me there with her, our family and grandkids.

● (2030)

I want to remind all of my colleagues in the House of the importance of our families and loved ones and the role they play in supporting our work. Our families and loved ones make just as many sacrifices as we do, if not more, to allow us to serve our community. We miss a lot of important moments in their lives while we serve, and when we leave public service, it is my belief that we owe it to them to make up for that lost time and to cherish our families.

I want to thank my incredible team of staff, both here in Hamilton and in Ottawa. In no particular order, I would like to say to Val, Rose, Bill, Tony, Kathleen and Aiden, and my former team members Chris, Erin and Jackie, that I thank them for everything they have done to support me, for their dedication and loyalty, our work throughout the years and their service to the people of Hamilton. Their dedication to our constituents shows how important it is for an MP to have a great team fighting for our community. They made me look good each and every day.

I want to thank the people behind the scenes supporting the whole NDP caucus, the team in the NDP lobby, particularly Anthony and Christian, who have made the time serving as a member of Parliament and being in the House so much easier and more effective. Their dedication is what allows us to be an effective caucus and do the work that we do best. They have provided so much guidance to us, and their contribution to our team is something I will never forget.

I thank my NDP caucus colleagues for fighting with me to protect workers, pensioners and seniors. I am proud to have served in a caucus that worked hard every day to protect people. I am grateful for all of their support, friendship and shared knowledge that made me a better MP.

I thank my leader, the hon. member for Burnaby South, for the guidance he has given our party. I cannot wait to see him become Prime Minister and demonstrate that an NDP government is the one that will put people first. Canadians can put their trust in New Democrats to fight for them.

I thank those in the labour movement who have supported my work and helped champion the causes I have taken on. In particular, I want to thank the incredible team at United Steelworkers, and Canadian director Ken Neumann and District 6 director Marty Warren for their faith in my fight to protect workers, retirees and pensioners. Their work and activism show that the Canadian labour movement is strong and will not quietly fight for the rights of workers across Canada, but will be loud until they are heard.

I want to thank the members of the Hamilton Mountain NDP and all the volunteers, supporters and activists who came out during each election and fought to make sure that Hamilton Mountain is represented by a New Democrat and by a party that will fight for them.

I also want to thank Monique Taylor, the MPP for Hamilton Mountain. From the time she was my assistant at City Hall to now, when we are working together representing Hamilton Mountain provincially and federally, we have been a great team. I am so proud of her work to fight for our community, and I cannot wait to see what more she does.

I want to thank the people of Hamilton. Without them and their support, I would not have had the honour of sitting in the House of

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Commons or the important duty of fighting for all of them. Every day that I spent serving the people of Hamilton was a privilege, and I was humbled by the trust they put in me to represent them.

I again want to thank my wife Sherry of 47 years. I am going to be home this time.

Mr. Speaker, it has been my greatest honour to be a member of Parliament. I thank you and I respect you.

I want to thank all the people in the House and I want to thank all the members. I have become friends with many of them. I really appreciate it. I have had a great time and I am going to miss a lot of people.

● (2035)

The Speaker: There being no further members rising, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, the committee will rise.

(Government Business No. 7 reported)

The Speaker: It being 8:37 p.m., this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 8:37 p.m.)

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