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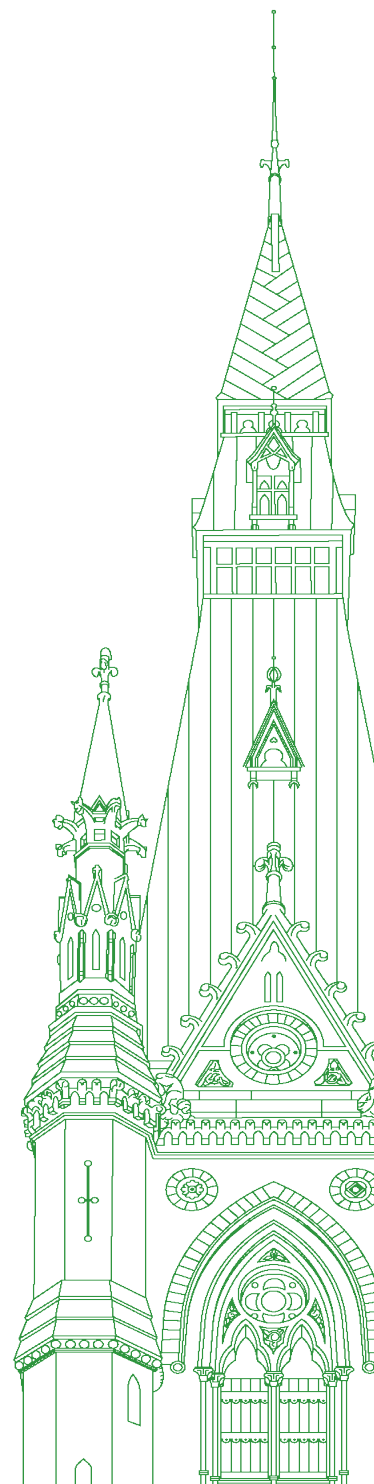
House of Commons Debates

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Tuesday, May 4, 2021

Speaker: The Honourable Anthony Rota



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 4, 2021

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Pat Finnigan (Miramichi—Grand Lake, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food entitled “Room to Grow: Strengthening Food Processing Capacity in Canada for Food Security and Exports”.

[Translation]

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

* * *

PETITIONS

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present this petition today.

[English]

The petition deals with the ongoing human rights abuses within the People's Republic of China. Specifically, petitioners call on the government to apply Magnitsky sanctions to enforce human rights in the case of practitioners of Falun Dafa and Falun Gong, who are persistently persecuted within the People's Republic of China by the Chinese Communist Party.

[Translation]

OLD AGE SECURITY

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a citizen's initiative turned into a petition. One of my constituents is asking the government to pay special attention to our seniors.

I therefore invite the government to change the name of the old age security program, which has been around for 70 years. It is a

simple gesture but a very important one to show respect for our seniors.

* * *

[English]

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 at this time, please.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT IN THE MILITARY

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC) moved:

That, given that:

- (a) women and all members of the Canadian Armed Forces placed their trust in this government to act on claims of sexual misconduct;
- (b) the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff was informed about a specific sexual harassment allegation against General Jonathan Vance three years ago;
- (c) the Prime Minister asserts that this sexual harassment allegation was never brought to his attention; and
- (d) the Prime Minister said that those in a position of authority have a duty to act upon allegations,

the House call upon the Prime Minister to dismiss his Chief of Staff for failing to notify him about a serious sexual harassment allegation at the highest ranks of the Canadian Armed Forces and for being complicit in hiding the truth from Canadians.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time this morning with my colleague, the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Business of Supply

I am going to be beginning debate today on our opposition day motion and, to be frank, I wish this was not a topic that we were discussing. There are a lot of very important and pressing issues that are facing the country today, issues such as vaccines, and the fact that we do not have enough vaccines and that there are very mixed messages coming out from the government about vaccines. There are also issues like the economy and jobs, and the fact that Liberals have no plan to secure our future.

At the foundation of those and other issues really is the question around trust and confidence that Canadians can put in their government; trust and confidence that their Prime Minister is telling them the truth; trust and confidence that the Prime Minister is acting in their best interest and not in his own; trust and confidence that when people do the wrong things at the highest level, they are held accountable.

That is why today we are debating the cover-up of sexual misconduct allegations against the chief of the defence staff by the Prime Minister, by his office and by his Minister of National Defence, and the fact that the cover-up needs to be brought to light and that people need to be held accountable to ensure that it never happens again.

Our men and women in uniform serve our country every day with honour and integrity, many times sacrificing not only their own lives, but their mental health, their own emotional and physical stability and health. They sacrifice their time with their families. They even sacrifice their relationships.

Women in military, women in uniform, have a unique sacrifice. They give up time with their own children, sometimes their very young children. They give up their own time to even have children. They give up so much to serve this country and they expect and they want to have confidence that their government will serve them with the same integrity, honour and sacrifice. Our women in uniform put their faith in their government to protect them from harassment, from sexual misconduct, from having their superiors being able to take advantage of their position of authority. Sadly, the Liberal government has failed them in doing so over the last number of years.

Today, we are going to be talking about what happened. We are going to talk about who knew, who did not know and who should be held accountable. We know the Minister of National Defence knew. We know that the ombudsman testified that he brought specific allegations of sexual misconduct to the Minister of National Defence back in 2018. We know the Minister of National Defence, at the time, told the ombudsman he did not want to hear about it, and he turned a blind eye. Unbelievably, he even refused to speak to the ombudsman again. I am sure throughout the day, we are going to hear more about what the Minister of National Defence did and did not do.

What I would like to focus my remarks on at this point is what happened in the Prime Minister's Office, the highest office of this land, and who should be held accountable for covering up those serious allegations.

We are being told to believe that the Prime Minister did not know. He has told Canadians, he has told the media and he has told

this House that he did not know about the allegations until just recently when all of us learned about them just a few months ago. We are told through testimony that the Prime Minister's chief adviser knew, as well as his chief of staff, Katie Telford, but apparently they did not tell him. They withheld this important information from the Prime Minister. That is what we are being told that we should believe.

For context, and this is important, let us remember that in March 2018, the Prime Minister and his office would have known that the evidence of him inappropriately groping a woman in 2000 was going to be brought to light. I personally recall the spring of 2018. It was one of the worst-kept secrets in Ottawa. There was an article circulating written by a young reporter detailing her very unpleasant experience with the Prime Minister when he was 28, in the Kokanees. If so many of us knew about this article, the Prime Minister and his office would have to have known.

He must have known that at some point it was going to be made public and he was going to be asked about it. In that context, it is important to consider what the Prime Minister could have reasonably been thinking and what his state of mind could have been. He could have been thinking that if he fired General Vance for allegations of sexual misconduct, he was also going to have to hold himself to the same standard when the evidence of his more egregious conduct came forward.

● (1010)

I am sure the Prime Minister would have been faced with a very serious personal choice had he known about the sexual allegations against General Vance, a choice of either dismissing the chief of the defence staff for what he had done or ignoring the allegations, thus protecting himself. When the Prime Minister was confronted with the groping incidents, he skated around it by saying that some women experience things differently. He gave himself a pass on his conduct, which I believe in and of itself shows how far away the Prime Minister is from being a feminist. It is classic misogynist behaviour to blame and dismiss the woman. Looking back now it all makes sense as to why the Prime Minister would have known about Vance but covered up the allegations.

In that same context, let us follow the Prime Minister's assertion that he did not know, that everyone around him knew but he was kept in the dark. Let us pretend that is reasonable, which I personally do not see as believable. That would mean the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Katie Telford, knew and she did not tell him. It means that Katie Telford knew of these allegations yet allowed the Prime Minister to go ahead between the course of 2018 and 2020 and not only praise General Vance publicly for his good work on Operation Honour, but also make him the longest-serving chief of the defence staff and give him a \$50,000 raise. To me, it just does not seem believable that a competent chief of staff would allow her boss, the Prime Minister of this country, to put himself in such a vulnerable position and set himself up to be so badly embarrassed, discredited and disbelieved. If that was true and I was the Prime Minister, I would say with friends like Katie Telford who needs enemies? I would be furious with her, but I note the Prime Minister does not seem too furious, does he?

• (1015)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am just going to hold the clock for a moment. There seems to be a microphone on. I want to remind members to make sure their mikes are off because it is interfering with House affairs right now.

The hon. deputy leader.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, something about this whole story that is being told does not ring true, but it is what the Prime Minister is saying so we are going to call him to act on it, because in his own words he said that those “in positions of authority” who know about a sexual allegation “have a duty to act”. We are calling on the Prime Minister to act on the fact that apparently Katie Telford knew but did not act.

On the other hand, if the Prime Minister knew and he is not admitting it, he needs to man up as soon as possible and admit he knew but did not want to act on it. Why? Because he was protecting himself.

What we are seeing is a pattern with the Prime Minister. We saw it with the SNC-Lavalin affair, where he denied to the country that he even knew there had been political interference. He denied it again and said that he did not interfere. It became clear when we actually heard the voice recording that there had been political interference. Similarly, as in the Vance cover-up, the SNC interference was for the Prime Minister's benefit, because he was worried about votes. At the end of the whole horrid SNC-Lavalin incident, two very smart and capable women were ousted, the hon. member for Vancouver Granville and Jane Philpott, the former health minister, and the Prime Minister came out smelling like a rose, at least in his own mind.

I hope today we are not seeing the same thing whereby the Prime Minister, in an attempt to protect himself at all costs, has not only failed to protect our women in the military, but in the end another competent woman, Katie Telford, will pay for his mistake. Make no mistake, her reputation is tarred. Do not get me wrong, if she covered it up she deserves to be fired. If she did not cover it up and he is not telling the truth, he needs to stand up, tell the truth, own up to what he has done and, maybe if not for once in his lifetime, but for sure once in his career as Prime Minister, take responsibility for his misdeeds, his conduct and his cover-up.

Winston Churchill said, “I no longer listen to what people say, I just watch what they do. Behaviour never lies.” I believe that is where we are with the Prime Minister and his claim of being a feminist. His actions show he is not a feminist. Canadian women are watching his behaviour, as are our women and men in uniform. The women in his own party, including those who work for him, have seen his behaviour, and if they have not seen it they need to take a hard look. The Conservatives have certainly seen his behaviour—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member's time for debate is up. She will be able to continue during questions and comments.

[Translation]

The hon. member for Thérèse-De Blainville.

Business of Supply

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, this is a serious situation. We need to speak out against it and we need to take action to address it.

The Conservative motion and the statements made by the member must not make anyone lose sight of the fact that the two parties chose to do nothing about Jonathan Vance. The Conservatives appointed him chief of the defence staff even though they had already heard about certain situations before doing so. I think your track record on this issue is not consistent with the fervour you are demonstrating today.

Where is your mea culpa in this situation?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the member that she is to address her questions and comments to the Chair, not directly to the member.

The hon. member for Portage—Lisgar.

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, I would like to correct something. The Liberals have been trying to deflect from what they have done in this current situation. They are trying to do that by blaming others.

The fact is that it was the Conservative government that actually initiated the Deschamps report. When rumours around General Vance were heard, Conservatives acted on them. That is very different from the current government. When given very concrete evidence from the ombudsman, the Minister of National Defence pushed it away and covered it up for over three years, and instead gave General Vance a raise, a promotion, and praised him. This is very telling, as is the fact that the Liberals are not owning up to it.

What we are saying today is that there can be no fix for this terrible problem, this terrible situation, until the Prime Minister owns up to the cover-up he has participated in.

• (1020)

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 the government House leader as he addressed the issue at great length yesterday.

In terms of what I heard from the government House leader, does the opposition member have any regrets with respect to things she put on the record that might have actually misled Canadians on this issue?

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, my biggest recollection yesterday from the government House leader was him throwing the F-bomb into the House of Commons. I would think he would have regret about that.

Business of Supply

The only regrets here should be with the government and the so-called feminist Prime Minister, who, time after time, throws strong and capable women under the bus. We have seen it with the hon. member for Vancouver Granville and Jane Philpott, and we could ask many women in the Liberal caucus. We are seeing it currently with the Prime Minister saying that Katie Telford knew but nobody told him about these sexual misconduct allegations. It is just not believable.

We are calling the Prime Minister's bluff. If, indeed, Telford did not tell him, he can fire her. However, if she did tell him, he needs to own up to it, he needs to take responsibility, and he needs to, for once in his career as Prime Minister, do the right thing for the men and women of the country and for the military, and not to protect himself.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, the issues of sexual allegations in the military are deeply concerning.

What I find really shocking today is that the Conservatives are trying to use this to exploit the issue. It is completely unacceptable that they are bringing it to Parliament to decide who gets fired and who does not. That is not something Parliament should be doing. This is a very disturbing issue, and the Conservatives are taking this issue and exploiting it for their own political benefit, not for the men and women in uniform.

Hon. Candice Bergen: Madam Speaker, I would completely disagree.

What the NDP is mostly concerned about is propping up the Liberals every chance it gets. It is sad to see the NDP abandoning the men and women in uniform, instead of showing some courage, taking a stand and calling the Prime Minister, his office and the Minister of National Defence to account for what they are doing.

I am not surprised. The NDP has lost all relevance, and it continues to do so today.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the deputy leader for her great opening comments and for bringing forward today's motion. We are calling the Prime Minister's bluff today, what he knew and what he did not do.

First, I want to tell those who serve our country in uniform that it is very clear that there is a huge problem in the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces with this ongoing and serious problem of sexual misconduct. We ask a lot of those in uniform. They serve in the Canadian Armed Forces every day, and they have taken the oath to protect each and every one of us. It is incumbent upon us as members of Parliament to do our best to ensure that they have a safe work environment. That means they should not be subjected to sexual harassment in the workplace.

When our sons and daughters, our sisters and brothers, our mothers and fathers serve this nation, they should never be subjected to sexual harassment. This unsafe culture must change. That is why our leader of the Conservative Party suggested, over two months ago, an action plan that the government could take today and implement and get real results.

As our leader said, we would order a service-wide independent investigation into sexual misconduct in the military. That would be from top to bottom. During that investigation, all general and flag officers' promotions and salaries would be frozen so that we can weed out any of the problems and then bring forward the proper promotions.

We would introduce policies to ensure that future complaints of sexual misconduct are made to a truly external, independent body that is completely outside of the chain of command. To change the culture and to ensure that we have a true egalitarian society within the Canadian Armed Forces, we would bring forward policies to make greater representation of women and other under-represented Canadians among the top ranks of the Canadian Armed Forces and all the services: air force, army and navy.

We have to ensure that the women and men who serve our country can do it with honour and without compromise. That all starts by making sure we have a safe environment and having women at the command table.

There is no question that what we are dealing with here today as a motion is about accountability. We already know that the Minister of National Defence was offered evidence of sexual harassment by the former chief of the defence staff, retired General Jonathan Vance. The Minister of National Defence pushed away that evidence instead of looking at it and acting upon it, as he is required to do as the minister and as is defined under the National Defence Act. By not taking that evidence, the Minister of National Defence failed our women and men in the Canadian Armed Forces.

The minister has said on multiple occasions that he referred that allegation to his chief of staff, Zita Astravas, who was his former chief of staff at that time, three years ago. This was March 1, 2018, and she passed that information on, as we found out at the national defence committee only two weeks ago, to the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Katie Telford. Then Katie Telford had Elder Marques, who was a former senior adviser to the Prime Minister, initiate the contact with the former military ombudsman, Gary Walbourne, with the former Clerk of the Privy Council, Michael Wernick, who has also testified at committee, and with Janine Sherman, who was the deputy clerk to cabinet.

We have heard lots of testimony at committee. We have read much about these allegations and the fallout that has been impacted upon in the media.

● (1025)

What we have to get down to today is that there is responsibility here for what Katie Telford did with that information. As our deputy leader, the member for Portage—Lisgar, just said, if we are to believe the Prime Minister, then that means Katie Telford withheld critical information about the top soldier of the land and that General Vance, who has the top security clearance in the country, was potentially compromised and could be easily blackmailed based upon these allegations of sexual misconduct.

If she did not tell the Prime Minister, that is very much an obstruction of a process to ensure that the chief of the defence staff, who reports to only two people, the Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister, had conducted himself without honour and that his ability to serve our country was severely compromised. Therefore, if we are to believe that Katie Telford did not fulfill her own responsibilities in informing the Prime Minister, then she should be fired. However, really, this is about calling Justin Trudeau's bluff, because I do not personally believe that Katie Telford would not have told the Prime Minister.

• (1030)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, the very experienced member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman referred to the Prime Minister by his full name, and I think he would want to refrain from doing that.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Yes, the hon. member did that and I would caution him about doing that. He knows very well that we are not to refer to MPs or ministers by their first or last names in the House.

The hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman.

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, I do apologize. There has been a lot of media lately and I get to use the Prime Minister's name frequently, so it is just a matter of habit these days, but I will refrain and will call him the Prime Minister.

We also have to keep our eye on what is happening in the Standing Committee on National Defence, because after we learned from Elder Marques, a week and a half ago, that Katie Telford was the first point of contact between the Minister of National Defence's office and the Prime Minister's Office, we immediately moved a motion to have her appear. The Liberals on that committee have been filibustering and blocking Katie Telford from appearing at our committee. This again speaks to the reality of this being a cover-up. The Liberals would rather protect Katie Telford than protect the women and men who serve our country in the Canadian Armed Forces.

This has to stop. We need to make sure that those who are in the chain of command, from the chief of the defence staff to the Minister of National Defence to the chief of staff to the Prime Minister and up to the Prime Minister, are all being honest with Canadians and providing us with the facts.

These ongoing filibusters and cancellations of meetings are an affront to democracy, and it really speaks to what bounds the Liberals are prepared to cross to ensure that our Parliament is dysfunctional. We will continue in our committee to ask that Katie Telford appear, but we also believe that it is incumbent upon this House for us to pronounce on whether Katie Telford did or did not know or did and did not tell the Prime Minister of these serious allegations against General Jonathan Vance.

We have to look at all the facts. We have to keep in mind that even though we have been dealing with this now for over three months that this has been in front of Canadians and in front of our House and at the defence committee, we know that Katie Telford was very busy in March 2018 dealing with the false allegations and the charges that were brought against the former vice-chief of the defence staff, Vice-Admiral Mark Norman. He was charged on

Business of Supply

March 8, 2018 and that was in process. We also know that the Liberals were dealing with sexual misconduct within the Prime Minister's Office itself with Claude-Éric Gagné, so their hands were full and they may have been distracted.

However, it was no excuse for them to give Jonathan Vance a pass, give him a raise, and extend his contract for another three years while he was in charge of Operation Honour. That was demoralizing to all those who serve in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have seen two times this week the Conservatives bringing forward opposition motions that do not serve the purpose of helping Canadians, as was pointed out earlier by the member for Timmins—James Bay. How would this motion actually help to advance the very important work that needs to be done in our military?

The member referred to the Conservatives' action plan on sexual misconduct in the military. Why not bring forward that action plan as an opposition motion to study here? That is something we could have a substantive debate on. We could discuss what that plan is and how the government might be able to adopt it.

Can the member explain why the Conservatives chose this motion, instead of bringing forward the action plan they have?

• (1035)

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, I know the member for Kingston and the Islands is very uncomfortable with this conversation. He does have a very large base and the Royal Military College in his riding, and I am sure he is getting a lot of emails, phone calls and visits from those who serve and who have served who are disappointed in the Liberal government.

Really, it comes down to this: When we are dealing with this issue of sexual misconduct, it is time for the Prime Minister and the Liberals to stop hiding the truth from Canadians. They have to take responsibility for their actions, both in the Minister of National Defence's office and in the Prime Minister's Office itself.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am also wondering about that. It is my conscience talking.

When we are dealing with an issue as significant as this one, we need to ask ourselves the following question: What is the ultimate intention in making today's debate so specific? The terms of the motion are quite valid.

That being said, what was the ultimate intention of taking action against an individual by claiming this will resolve the situation?

[English]

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, this is about forcing the Prime Minister to play his hand and drop his cards. It is time to stop the bluff.

Business of Supply

This is about making sure the cover-up ends and that Canadians, we parliamentarians and especially those who serve in uniform know the facts around the Liberal government not acting on Jonathan Vance's misconduct, which was alleged back in March, 2018. They undermined Operation Honour by leaving him in charge and extending his contract by another three years. They gave him a salary increase that was as high as \$50,000, and they turned a blind eye to the tragedy that was occurring in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Sexual misconduct in the armed forces under the Liberal government is increasing. Over the last five years, one person was sexually assaulted every three days in the Canadian Armed Forces. That has to stop, and that will stop when we get down to the truth.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I just want to be really clear here. We are in the House today talking about what is happening to women across the country, but we are not focusing on the results they need to feel safe in the military. We are talking about firing a woman who actually does not have that much power. The power lies in the minister's hands and the Prime Minister's hands.

Could the member talk about why they chose this, instead of actually bringing forward something that would make a difference for women serving this country?

Mr. James Bezan: Madam Speaker, it is quite simple. The chief of staff to the Prime Minister is one of the most powerful people in the country, and if Katie Telford did not share this information with the Prime Minister, then she deserves to be fired because she did not fulfill her own duties, or her responsibility, to the country and the Prime Minister. If the Prime Minister did know, and he has been misleading Canadians about that from the start, then he should apologize, come clean and tell us the truth once and for all.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to address this opposition day motion by discussing our efforts to prevent and address sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces and the department of National Defence.

[Translation]

I want to talk about the efforts that were highlighted during last week's announcement about a new independent external comprehensive review and a new organization dedicated to creating the conditions for enduring cultural reform throughout the armed forces.

We recognize that our past efforts have failed. Serious allegations against senior military officers have cast a pall over the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence as a whole. We recognize that our efforts have not fully resolved the problems identified by survivors or delivered the results they deserved.

• (1040)

[English]

We have a responsibility to ensure that our people work in an environment where they are treated with dignity and respect. It is a responsibility that we take very seriously. With that in mind, I would like to take a moment to address recent accusations concerning the

Minister of National Defence and the allegations against the former chief of defence staff, General Vance.

When the minister met with the then Canadian Armed Forces ombudsman on March 1, 2018, at the very end of the meeting, Mr. Walbourne raised a non-specific allegation against General Vance. Mr. Walbourne did not go into details. Out of respect for the integrity and independence of the investigative process, the minister directed the ombudsman to share the allegations with the appropriate authorities. The matter was shared with the Privy Council Office, which is directly responsible for Governor in Council appointments, including the chief of defence staff.

The fair and unbiased investigation into allegations of wrongdoing is fundamental to our system of justice. It is fundamental to our concept of democracy. Such investigations must never be or even appear to be tainted by political influence. The actions that the minister took were the same as the previous Conservative government. They are the same actions, in fact, that the leader of the opposition took when he received rumours of sexual misconduct regarding General Vance prior to his appointment as chief of the defence staff.

Over the past months, we have heard harrowing accounts from others who have faced sexual misconduct in the line of duty, pointing to serious problems with our institutional culture, and we highlighted the need for comprehensive and lasting change. I have personally heard from many survivors, many of those impacted, and I want to thank them for coming forward and sharing their accounts. It is making a difference. We have listened, and we are taking action.

As the minister announced last Thursday, former justice of the Supreme Court, Madame Louise Arbour, has agreed to lead a new, independent, external, comprehensive review of our institutional policies and culture. This review will build on previous efforts to date, including the Deschamps report.

Through this review, Madame Arbour will provide crucial, tangible recommendations on how we can better protect our people and set the conditions for a lasting culture change. Most notably, we will look to her for guidance and recommendations on how we can set up an independent external reporting system outside of the chain of command for defence team members that meets the needs of those who have experienced sexual misconduct. We will also look to her to help us to ensure that our military justice system can properly respond to incidents and put survivors at the centre of it.

We will strengthen our existing structures on both the military and civilian sides, including the sexual misconduct response centre, to provide greater confidence to those who need support, and to help us review our evaluation and promotion system in the Canadian Armed Forces with a focus on how our organization selects and trains its leaders.

This leadership piece is very important. In fact, this is critical. As we have seen from media reports, the previous Conservative government decided to appoint General Vance as chief of the defence staff, even though he was under active investigation into sexual misconduct by the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service and the current leader of the opposition was personally aware of rumours of sexual misconduct.

Just as the Conservatives were about to appoint their hand-picked choice to lead the Canadian Armed Forces, the commanding officer leading the investigation into General Vance said he was under pressure to drop the investigation. Pressure from whom? Who was behind this pressure? Did the Conservative government push the investigation to be closed, to clear the way for General Vance? These are important questions that I hope my colleagues will address, but I digress.

I mentioned Madame Arbour earlier. Her work will provide crucial, tangible recommendations on how we can better protect our people and set the conditions for lasting culture change. She will carry out this work transparently and independently from the chain of command, with input from appropriate stakeholders inside and outside of the defence team. She will assess our progress in applying the recommendations of the Deschamps report and help us build on those efforts. Throughout the process, she will be able to provide any interim recommendations, which we will act upon as they come in.

In addition to the review by Madame Arbour, we have launched a new organization within the defence team, tasked with setting the conditions for cultural transformation across the institution. That is beginning right now. We know that there are problematic aspects of military culture that can foster sexual misconduct and other harmful behaviours. These are values, beliefs and behaviours that prioritize toughness and aggression over emotional intelligence and cooperation.

These parts of our culture are completely unacceptable. They make us less effective and reliable as an organization. They erode the confidence people have in our institution and, most importantly, they harm those who have chosen to wear the uniform and devoted their lives to keeping us safe.

Under the leadership of Lieutenant-General Jennie Carignan, serving as the chief of professional conduct and culture, this new organization will examine how we can address these toxic parts of our military culture, informed by best practices, as well as experts, advocates and those with lived experience, inside and outside of our military. This organization will unify, integrate and coordinate our existing efforts, including ensuring the interim steps Madame Arbour recommends are addressed immediately and fully. Ultimately, they will provide concrete steps that we can take to prevent sexual misconduct and other harmful behaviours from happening in the first place.

The work that this new organization has been tasked with, and Madame Arbour's efforts, both take into account the fact that sexual misconduct does not happen in a bubble, nor is it the only harmful behaviour that can leave lasting trauma. To create lasting change, we have to look at the full spectrum of the problem.

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We have to examine systemic challenges such as abuses of power, discrimination, biases and negative stereotypes, and address each of them appropriately. We have to shed ourselves of the outdated and toxic notions of what it means to be a warrior, an attitude that can foster these harmful behaviours and values. We have to transform the culture of our military from top to bottom, and we must have the right reporting and investigative structures in place to handle incidents when they occur.

We are deeply committed to building a culture of inclusion across the defence team. With these new initiatives, we are taking active steps to prevent sexual misconduct and other harmful behaviours by looking at our existing structures, and the values and behaviours of our institution.

● (1045)

We are ensuring that every member of our team is treated with dignity and respect at all times. At the same time, we also know that we need to do more to support people when they have been harmed. That is why, through budget 2021, our government is providing over \$236 million in funding to expand our support systems to ensure the independence of sexual misconduct allegations and to improve our capacity to handle harassment and gender-based violence through the military justice system. As part of this, we are expanding the reach of our sexual misconduct response centres across the country. This is an important step to ensure that members and veterans who have been affected by military sexual trauma can access the resources and the supports they need.

We have heard from people affected by military sexual trauma and we know that they face different challenges than survivors of other forms of conflict-based trauma. That is why the work that our sexual misconduct response centres do is so important. They have been a key resource for those in our organization affected by sexual misconduct since 2015. They offer 24/7 confidential support and counselling services to anyone who reaches out and, crucially, their work is carried out independently from the military chain of command.

Dr. Denise Preston and her team help members navigate the various support services available to them, both inside and outside the department. They can help members access the right mechanisms to report incidents of sexual misconduct, including a military liaison team made up of a Military Police liaison officer, a special military adviser and a military liaison officer. This team is dedicated to the work of the SMRC and they are experts in their field. They can give members advice about how to make a complaint or about what is involved in an investigative process and they can facilitate reporting if the member chooses to do so.

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The SMRC can also assign a dedicated counsellor to support members through the process, including advocating for them, accompanying them to appointments and assisting with workplace accommodations. However, this is just one piece of the work they do.

The SMRC is also working with affected members to develop new programs and create a national survivor-supported strategy and it provides crucial, expert guidance and recommendations that shape the policies and programs we have in place across the defence team.

To support its efforts, budget 2021 also provides funding to develop a new peer-to-peer support program. In the coming weeks and months, we will work with Veterans Affairs Canada, professionals, mental health professionals and those with lived experience to launch this program. It will include both online and in-person support informed by best practices and available to any Canadian Armed Forces member or veteran who has been harmed.

Finally, this funding also ensures that we will continue our efforts to implement the declaration of victims rights in our military justice system.

We have worked extensively with victims groups and we will soon launch an online questionnaire to solicit anonymous feedback from DND employees and Canadian Armed Forces members. Through these efforts, we will make the changes needed to modernize our military justice system in line with the commitments we put forth in Bill C-77. We are dedicated to building a military justice system that takes a victim-centric approach and truly gives victims and survivors a voice. We have already made some important progress implementing Bill C-77 and we will keep doing this critical work.

We want to ensure that we have the best support available when people have been harmed. Through the funding provided in budget 2021, we are doing just that. We know that gaps in our institutional policies led us to fail our fellow team members. We have not lived up to our responsibility to protect our people. We have seen that the values we proclaim to hold dear do not always match people's lived experiences.

• (1050)

Every defence team member, every Canadian, deserves to work in an environment free from harassment and discrimination, an environment where they are treated with dignity and respect, an environment where they are valued for their skills. However, the past weeks and months have shown us we still have a lot of work to do to make this environment a reality.

For those who have been harmed, I am very truly sorry. We have listened; we are still listening. Our efforts must deal with the issues at the root of the problem. We cannot just treat sexual misconduct on a case-by-case basis. We have also learned that culture change on this scale cannot simply be ordered. It requires active effort from all of us and a strong understanding of the parts of our culture that have caused harm. Our efforts must be comprehensive. They must be lasting. They must address the systemic changes that keep us from moving forward.

I know that many people are skeptical of our efforts, and with good reason. Too much damage has been done. Too many people have been affected.

• (1055)

[Translation]

However, I promise that we will do whatever it takes to transform the culture within our Canadian Armed Forces and get to the root of sexual misconduct and other toxic behaviours.

I also want to make it clear that the measures the minister announced last week are just the first steps based on the conclusions of the independent external comprehensive review.

Under the leadership of the chief of professional conduct and culture, and following the recommendations of other experts dedicated to cultural transformation, we will continue to make progress.

We will do whatever it takes to restore confidence, and we will keep working to ensure a genuine culture of dignity and respect for all those serving in the forces.

[English]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary was saying the right words, but the actions do not actually align. The Prime Minister many years ago suggested a minister should be fired simply over a \$16-orange juice, but for over three years now, no one in the military has been held to account for very important allegations that were made.

The government said that it would redo a report that was already done. My question for the parliamentary secretary is this. What does she have to say about no one being held to account and about another study being done when the government has a very comprehensive document that should be used to make the changes required?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Madam Speaker, in fact, people are being held to account. We are seeing right now that there are ongoing military police investigations. We are very grateful to Madame Deschamps for the report. In fact, we have put in legislation and created a whole new institution, the SMRC, but it was not enough.

Even Madame Deschamps has said that Madame Arbour will build on the work she did. The terms of reference are very broad. Madame Deschamps laid out what the problem was and what needed to be done. What Madame Arbour is doing is the how. We heard the minister say that Madame Arbour's recommendations will be binding.

It is very important to note that we are not leaving it to the military and the department to do the implementation and interpret the recommendations. This time, Madame Arbour will go through the extremely important task of laying out of exactly what needs to be done, and it will be implemented.

I know the survivors are skeptical, but they will see we are building on the work we have already done. We are continuing to do that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Terrebonne.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ): Madam Speaker, over the past few weeks I have been very saddened by the debates on this critical issue, for a variety reasons. Among these reasons, there is the seriousness of the subject itself and the fact that the military institution has been brought into total disrepute, even though it is a strong symbol for society in general. The crisis has contributed to a complete loss of confidence on the part of the military in their chain of command and on the part of the general public in the institution.

The Bloc Québécois will never form government. Therefore, it will never launch a war of accusations to find out who is guilty, whether it be the previous Conservative government, the present Liberal government or the next government to be elected. It is more important that we resolve this situation once and for all. Given the current context of a minority government, we will not have much time to debate.

My colleague, the parliamentary secretary, listed all the mechanisms that currently exist, as well as the various elements of the Deschamps Report, which proposed some fairly specific corrections that need to be swiftly implemented. I must also remind our colleagues—

• (1100)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I asked for a question. The member has been speaking for a while now. If he wants to ask a question, it is time to do so. If not, I will ask the parliamentary secretary to respond. The exchanges must not take more than one minute because many people do have questions to ask.

Mr. Michel Boudrias (Terrebonne, BQ): Madam Speaker, I will ask my question.

We are talking about the top ranks of the Canadian Armed Forces. Perhaps it is time to make a decision instead of dithering and getting nowhere. My question—

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

[English]

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Madam Speaker, I think Mr. Wernick said it best, when the former clerk of the Privy Council testified that everyone acted in good faith.

At this point, one of the key problems is that we do not have a process in place where people feel safe coming forward. Without having somebody willing to come forward, it is very hard to hold people accountable and to investigate. That is what we are addressing. That is what we are focused on right now. That is what Madame Arbour is addressing.

I will note that there are many different views about how an external reporting body should be structured. That is Madame Arbour's task. That is something well beyond what Madame De-

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schamps did. She said that we needed something outside. We are now looking at actually implementing it.

I would note that this is the first time in history that senior military officers are all agreeing to take this outside of the military, to have external accountability. This is a hugely significant change. It is a moment where, yes, absolutely, this should have been done much sooner, decades ago, but we are getting it done now.

I hope all members of the House will work together with us to ensure that we do right by these women and men in uniform.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, the parliamentary secretary mentioned repeatedly, and we heard it repeatedly from the Minister of National Defence, that the minister did not want to be involved because he did not want to politically influence this case and the process.

Would the member not agree that by not acting, by ignoring the pleas of this women and shuffling it off to somebody else, saying it is somebody else's responsibility, is a form of political influence that negatively impacted women coming forward?

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Madam Speaker, with all due respect, I reject the premise of that question.

This was acted on within hours. We all know that as politicians we should not be the ones investigating and we should not be the ones who are taking the action. We have heard members of the House say that we should have told General Vance there was an allegation, which would have tipped him off, the last thing survivors want. Even well-intentioned, politicians should not be doing this.

In fact, the minister, within hours, ensured that it went to the correct place, which is the Privy Council Office. Within a day, it contacted Mr. Walbourne to see whether he could provide what we now know was an email. We did not have that. We did not have the name of the complainant. We did not even know that it was an email. We did not know the nature or the specifics of the allegations.

Again, I go to my previous comment. If people felt safe to come forward, we would have that information and we could do an investigation. That is the focus. That is what we are working on. I know the NDP joins us in wanting to establish that kind of process, so it is outside of the chain of command. That is the way—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Questions and comments, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have been listening very closely to what Conservatives have been saying today. I have heard the member for Portage—Lisgar, when introducing the motion, say it is based on something that the Prime Minister is saying that she does not even believe to be true. I have heard the member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman say that this motion is about the PM showing his poker hand. I have heard the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo reference a former Conservative chief of staff who was asked to be fired over a \$14 orange juice.

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Is this payback? I do not understand. All of the information that has been brought forward by Conservatives today does not seem to address the issue as much as it is a narrative about attacking the Prime Minister. Can the parliamentary secretary comment on that?

• (1105)

Ms. Anita Vandenbeld: Madam Speaker, my colleague said it very well. We really need to make sure that we end the toxic, partisan finger-pointing, and all parties get together and focus on what we can do to provide the right supports to survivors. We are not going to get it right every time. In Operation Honour, we did not get it right but we tried certain things. We keep on trying things. We put in legislation to change the justice system, such as Bill C-77. We have put in a whole new institution, which is the SMRC.

We have to build on the things that were done right and then make the changes survivors are asking for. We really need to be listening to survivors and I think that is being lost in this debate today. This is not about the politicians, the men, and who said what or who did what. This is about the people, men and women, who need us right now. They need Parliament to be focused on solutions, on fixing the problem and on doing right by them.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would like to remind hon. members to limit their questions and comments to one minute.

There are many members who want to ask questions, so it is important for everyone to limit their time to one minute, to allow others to participate.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord.

After reading the Conservative motion, I cannot say we were surprised that such a motion was moved. For weeks now, we have been disappointed time and time again by the government's failure to act or properly contain this situation. Instead, the scandal continues to grow.

It all began when the Canadian Forces ombudsman approached the Minister of National Defence to inform him about an issue with his chief of the defence staff. The ombudsman indicated that he was in possession of emails and evidence demonstrating inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature by the chief of the defence staff.

Rather than looking into the matter, taking it seriously and examining the evidence, the defence minister decided that he did not want to know anything about it. He therefore chose to turn a blind eye and look the other way. That is when the problem began. Usually, when someone presents evidence and disturbing facts to the authorities, they expect everything to go well and they hope the authorities will take the necessary steps to fix the problem.

What were the consequences? The Minister of National Defence refused to hold any more meetings with the then ombudsman, Gary Walbourne, until the end of his term, so when he left office. The

minister looked the other way and did everything in his power to avoid having to deal with the situation. For three years, the minister allowed General Vance to remain at his post despite the allegations that had been brought to his attention. Worse yet, he even gave General Vance a raise.

When the story was reported in the media and everyone started to realize what happened, the minister said that the ombudsman had not talked to the right person. He started blaming the ombudsman. It seems that the ombudsman should not have gone to the minister to talk to him about his chief of the defence staff.

The ombudsman, however, told us that the only person he could go see was the Minister of Defence. That was then confirmed by the next ombudsman, who said that he would have done exactly the same thing in his predecessor's shoes. The minister was in trouble. Then, the minister claimed that he was unaware of the sexual nature of the allegations.

The government was no better. The Prime Minister also claimed he was unaware. In the end it came out that some employees of the Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister's Office were in fact aware. Then the Prime minister reiterated that he was unaware, but we were right to say that his office was aware. Finally, the Prime Minister was unaware, but his office and the PCO were aware. The Prime Minister then clarified that he and his office were unaware of the sexual nature of the allegations. That was also later denied.

Unfortunately, it is all one big mess right now, since the government's story changes as the situation evolves. We keep learning more. Even if it turns out that more people were aware, the situation is still not resolved.

Allow me to give an overview of the situation. The Minister of National Defence was aware, because the ombudsman told him. However, the minister refused to look at the documents, take meaningful action or conduct an investigation. The chief of staff to the Minister of Defence was aware. The clerk of the Privy Council was aware. Elder Marques, an adviser to the Prime Minister, was aware. The Prime Minister's chief of staff was aware, and she was the one who apparently told Elder Marques, according to his testimony. All of these people were aware, but the Prime Minister was not.

• (1110)

It becomes harder and harder to believe the Liberals when this is what they are telling us, especially when they are doing everything they can to prevent people from testifying in committee.

The meeting that the Standing Committee on National Defence was supposed to hold this week was unilaterally cancelled by the committee chair. Before that, the government was filibustering to try to kill as much time as possible in committee so that the chief of staff would not be able to come testify and tell us what she knew.

Every time we invite a new witness, we learn that someone else was also aware of the situation. Perhaps we have gotten to the last step before finding out that the Prime Minister knew as well. Perhaps Ms. Telford would have had no choice but to tell us that the Prime Minister was aware or perjure herself. By all indications, that is where we were headed. It is getting harder and harder to believe that the Prime Minister was not aware when everyone else was. Their whole story is getting harder to believe.

Speaking of hard to believe, it is important that we come back to the Minister of National Defence. When we asked him why he did not act and look at the information being presented to him, he answered that he wanted to avoid political interference. In his view, reading the documentation and the evidence presented to him would have constituted political interference. That is his story.

However, when we heard from the current ombudsman and his predecessor, both said it absolutely would not have been political interference for him to read the information that was being brought to his attention. That is quite the opposite view. We also asked the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service whether reading the information would have been political interference, and we were told it would not.

After that, the minister stated that it was not up to him to conduct the investigation. Members will notice that the story changed slightly again. First, reading the documents was interference, but then ordering an investigation was also interference. He is therefore claiming that looking at documents constitutes investigating. This reasoning is a bit twisted, but that is the Liberals' reasoning at present.

Looking at documents is now considered the same as conducting an investigation. The mere possibility of looking at the documents and calling for an investigation is no longer even being considered. Interference is being confused with all kinds of terms, in all kinds of ways.

We presented all of these twisted Liberal stories to various committee witnesses, including the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service, and, each time, we were told that it absolutely was not interference to look at documents or to call for an investigation. The only interference there could have been would have been if someone had interfered with the investigation in an attempt to undermine it.

By not doing his job, we could say the minister undermined the investigation and prevented the situation from being resolved so we could get to the bottom of this matter.

After attempting to blame everyone except themselves, the Liberals are now trying to use interference as an excuse for sitting on their hands and not dealing with the problem. The minister has done nothing, just as he did nothing with Justice Deschamps' report. That report was placed on his desk in 2015, six years ago, and the recommendations it contained have yet to be put in place.

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The frustrating part is that, last week, the government tried to make everyone forget about all that by making a big show of announcing that it was appointing Justice Arbour to do more or less what Justice Deschamps did six years ago. Basically, it is going back to square one and sweeping all that under the rug. That is frustrating because it could have chosen to act on the recommendations in the Deschamps report now. Instead, it is kicking the can down the road and trying to convince people that it is doing something when the truth is that nothing is being done. Ultimately, the minister is refusing to admit that he is responsible for this situation.

One can sense the panic. The government would have us believe it is doing something revolutionary by doing the same thing that was done six years ago. In the end, all of that came to naught. After pretending they had no idea what was going on, the governing Liberals, like the minister, tried to blame everyone but themselves. Now that their backs are to the wall, they are blaming the system and are incapable of taking responsibility for failing to take action. That is deeply disappointing.

• (1115)

I am sure that, when Canadian Armed Forces members and civilians realize the government did nothing and tolerated people doing these things, with all the blame—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I apologize for interrupting the member, but his time is up. He still has time to respond to questions and comments though.

The hon. member for Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley.

[*English*]

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Madam Speaker, a few minutes ago the parliamentary secretary made a very nice speech taking responsibility and admitting that the Liberals did things wrong. I found myself thinking that this was really a speech that the Minister of National Defence needed to give. Contrary to that, on Sunday when being interviewed by Mercedes Stephenson, the minister was asked five times whether he was advised by the ombudsman that this was a matter of inappropriate sexual behaviour, and he refused to answer.

Tell me, how can we solve a problem if the minister will not even admit that there is one?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very important question. We have asked the same question five times and still have not gotten an answer. In the past, the minister claimed that he was not aware of the allegations of sexual misconduct. Now, on television, he is no longer even answering the question. As a result, we are wary of the minister's answer, or rather his lack of answer.

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It is disappointing because, as my colleague pointed out, this prevents us from getting to the bottom of this matter and discovering the truth. It dashes our hopes that a process will be implemented for the future. The government is trying to tell us that it will stop investigating and resolve the situation in the Canadian Armed Forces. However, the problem is that it will be very difficult to believe that credible action is being taken to resolve the problem unless and until we find out what is going on at the top.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I think he provided a complete picture of the situation.

The defence minister misled a parliamentary committee and then tried to cover it up. He then blamed someone else and said that it was not his fault. Now, he is hiding and being contradicted by the former ombudsman. When we asked him to take action, the only thing he did was to launch a new review of the practices of the Canadian army, when Justice Deschamps' recommendations have been around for six years. The government is once again putting things off.

Does my colleague not find that this motion misses the mark? It is not really the Prime Minister's chief of staff who should resign, but the Minister of National Defence himself.

• (1120)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Madam Speaker, my colleague raises a very good point.

I would not go so far as to say that the official opposition motion is completely unnecessary, because it also asks whether the Prime Minister was aware. He claims he was not, but everyone around him was. His government is adamantly refusing to allow his chief of staff to appear before the committee, which is really frustrating.

At the end of the day, clearly, the one person who did not take the necessary action was the Minister of National Defence. He was the one to whom the situation was first reported, and he was the one who refused to act, to make the decisions that needed to be made and to look at the facts. He chose to put off taking action, and he did so with willful blindness. It is his department that is on fire, so the buck stops with him. The Prime Minister is not entirely blameless, however.

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments, which bring the government's inaction to light.

We must not forget the victims underlying this debate who are waiting for us to take action as parliamentarians. People continue to fall through the cracks because of this government's inaction. I imagine you have other examples of this inaction to share?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would remind the member to address the Chair and not the member directly.

The hon. member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères has time for a quick response.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Madam Speaker, the most frustrating example of this inaction is the government's failure to implement the recommendations that Justice Deschamps made six years

ago, even though it promised to do so and claims to be a feminist government. It can try to convince us that it is doing everything it should, but, unfortunately, it does not do what is required when it is informed of intolerable situations. These striking examples of inaction are truly unacceptable.

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Madam Speaker, we are here today because of what is probably the most appalling situation since this government came to power. If it is not the most appalling, it is one of the most appalling.

First, it is sad to think that men and women who are part of our armed forces and are there to protect us are experiencing sexual harassment or any types of attitudes that are unacceptable in a self-respecting society. It is sad to think that these young women and young men are victims.

Not only is that sad, but it is also unacceptable that officers who are supposed to lead the armed forces are displaying such conduct. It is not acceptable, and what they are doing to these people is horrible. We must not tolerate this.

Lastly, not only is the situation sad and unacceptable, it is also shameful. It is shameful because we have a government that does not see anything, does not want to see anything, and does not do anything.

Justice Deschamps issued her report in 2015. For six years, the government knew that certain things needed to be done, but it did not do them. It took the report, put it on the shelf and forgot about it. This government has a funny interpretation of ministerial responsibility.

On March 25, the House of Commons ordered witnesses to testify before a committee I sit on. Certain government ministers ordered their staffers not to obey the House's orders and not to appear. The ministers decided that they were the ones who should appear and that ministerial responsibility means speaking for the people who work for them. That is not what ministerial responsibility is. Ministers cannot answer questions if they do not know the answers, because their employees are the ones who know the answers. That is obvious. That is plain common sense. Ministerial responsibility is what we are talking about today.

The Conservatives are asking that the Prime Minister fire his chief of staff, and I understand why. The whole thing makes no sense. However, if we follow the Prime Minister's logic, that is where it takes us.

The Prime Minister says that he is not aware of anything. We now know that the Minister of Finance knew, the clerk of the Privy Council knew, and the Prime Minister's chief of staff knew. In fact, we know that everyone knew, except the Prime Minister.

Moreover, the Prime Minister has not always held to the same story. Based on the story where his chief of staff did not tell him what happened, when we know how serious the situation was, then logically, he should fire her. However, he did not fire her. I do not think that the Prime Minister is stupid. I think he has a modicum of intelligence and ability to manage government affairs. Why then has he not fired his chief of staff, who apparently hid something so important from him?

The only explanation I can think of is that she did not hide it from him. He knew, but he shirked his responsibility, like he always does. During the WE scandal, he threw his finance minister under the bus. Maybe that minister should be joined by the Minister of National Defence.

The chief of staff is doing her job. I do not think it is right that she was aware of the situation yet nothing happened. However, I think it is not so much her fault as the Prime Minister's. Ultimately, whose fault is it really, when we look at everything we know so far?

The situation was unacceptable, as I said before. However, the ombudsman was made aware of the situation. That is important: the person went to see the ombudsman, who went to see the Minister of National Defence. The minister told him that he did not want to see or hear it, that the situation bothered him, that he did not know what to do about it. That is the antithesis of ministerial responsibility.

• (1125)

The person responsible for what goes on in his or her department is the minister. It was the minister's job to deal with the fact that the chief of the defence staff was being accused of inappropriate behaviour. He should have suspended the chief of the defence staff, with pay if necessary, and conducted an investigation. He should have gotten to the bottom of it and taken the necessary measures.

The fact that he hid and said that he did not want to hear about it, that he was not the right person to talk to and that the person should talk to someone else, though we do not know who, where or how, is surprising. There is something serious going on at the Department of National Defence and in the Canadian Armed Forces. The minister should do his job instead of refusing to listen and playing hide and seek.

The Prime Minister is playing hide and seek too. They keep trying to hide behind one another. Their story changes weekly. Once again, I understand the Conservatives' motion. It is exasperating to be told things like that. They are acting like children, saying things like "it is not my fault, it is his" and "I did not know, she did not tell me". If she did not tell him, she should be fired.

I want to hear the Prime Minister and his Minister of National Defence tell us what really happened. I would like them to try to reconcile the various stories they have given us so far. How can they not have known, but then have known a little bit, but not all the details, or who, how, where and how much? How can that be? How can they change their minds as easily as they change their clothes?

I would like to hear from the Prime Minister. I would like to know why he has not fired his chief of staff, if she really hid a situation like that from him. They must think the members of the House and Canadians are idiots, because what is going on in the Canadian Armed Forces is serious. We need to do something, so I do understand why the Conservatives moved this motion.

Unfortunately, the Bloc Québécois will probably vote against it. It is not because the situation is without interest. It is serious. It is one of the biggest scandals since the government came to power six

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years ago. There have been others, and we could spend all day talking about them. However, the person who is accountable under the principle of ministerial responsibility is the Minister of National Defence. He is the head of this department, he is the one running its branches, including the Canadian Armed Forces, and he is the one who is accountable. The Prime Minister is also accountable. He and his minister must stop acting like children and hiding behind one another and their staff.

According to one version of the story I heard, the Minister of National Defence even said that the allegations against General Vance did not matter that much. If allegations like these do not matter to the Minister of Defence, I do not know what does. Once again, what he should have done when he learned about the situation, when the ombudsman went to see him, was to take a stand like a responsible minister and to tell the ombudsman that he should leave it to him, that he would take care of it, and that this was not going to happen on his watch. That is what he should have said. However, that is not what he said. He preferred not to listen to the ombudsman. Today he is paying the price, since the entire government is dealing with a shocking scandal because no one wanted to take responsibility.

For all of these reasons, I am announcing that we will be voting against the motion, although, once again, the situation is utterly appalling and heads should roll. I would like the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence to agree to testify and give us a detailed, accurate, clear and coherent report on what happened. We do not want any more secrets, red herrings or childish excuses like "I did not see it", "I hardly saw it", "I did not know", "the ombudsman told me, but he did not tell me everything", "he did not tell me it was so serious", or "he told me no one knew what was going on". I want a responsible Prime Minister and a responsible minister.

• (1130)

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Rivière-du-Nord. I enjoyed his speech.

It is obvious that there is a major problem in the Canadian Armed Forces and that we must protect women from sexual misconduct. What baffles me is that my colleague just told us that the Bloc Québécois will vote against taking actual steps to deal with this sexual misconduct. I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about the consistency of his position. Is he interested in protecting Canadian women?

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. As for consistency, I cannot repeat everything I just said. That would be redundant.

The person responsible for all this is the Minister of Defence, and he is hiding. The Prime Minister is also responsible, and he is hiding too.

The chief of staff is the Prime Minister's employee. If he is not satisfied with her work, I find it hard to believe that he will not do anything about it. He can hide behind people but, at some point, he will put his big boy pants on and fire her.

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I do not think that the solution is to fire the chief of staff. The solution is to have the Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister tell us what happened, put on their big boy pants and take responsibility. That is the solution.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my question is really for the last Conservative speaker who intervened. He suggested that this motion would be a concrete action to help women in our armed forces. Notwithstanding that I may disagree with some of the other comments that my colleague from the Bloc indicated, I certainly would agree with him that this is not a concrete action that will help anybody.

Would the Bloc not agree that this motion does not serve a purpose that helps anybody, other than to try to attack one particular individual?

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Madam Speaker, I am happy to hear a colleague in the Liberal party say that the solution proposed by the Conservative party will not fix the situation. He is correct. I must say so. However, I would like to hear what he thinks might fix the situation.

It is quite simple: The Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister must put on their big boy pants, take responsibility and do their job. We have a 2015 report on the situation in the Canadian Armed Forces. Justice Deschamps did not do all that for nothing. She was surely paid to deliver a thorough report that was then put on the shelf.

Implementing the recommendations in the report would have helped fix the situation, yet all the Prime Minister did was mention it in his mandate letters to the ministers of National Defence. Since 2015, three defence ministers have received the mandate letter to implement the report's recommendations, but they have not done so.

The government now says it wants to commission another report. Will that actually fix anything? No, it will be a futile, theoretical exercise. It is absurd.

• (1135)

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, my hon. colleague talked a lot about responsibility and how it is a key part of this discourse. One thing, though, has upset me. It has been so disappointing. I wonder if my colleague agrees with me about that. Being in this place, we watch every day the games that are being played between the government and the official opposition about whose process was better, who followed what, or whose responsibility it was. That one-upmanship and that base does not serve women in the Armed Forces.

Would the hon. member agree that that is not where this discourse has to go?

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question. I agree that it is quite the show to see the Conservatives and Liberals passing the buck back and forth,

just as the Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister are doing.

The Conservatives are far from blameless here. They are the ones who appointed General Vance chief of the defence staff at the time, when they knew full well about these types of problems. It is a little surprising to hear them say that it is scandalous and we need to do something. Their fix is to fire the chief of staff.

That is not how things work. As I said, ministerial responsibility lies with the minister. The Conservatives were in power and, had they cared for ministerial responsibility at the time, they would have conducted an investigation to get to the bottom of the matter, rather than appointing General Vance. They did not.

Today the Liberals are in power and they did nothing about it either even though the reports said they need to put management systems in place.

Neither side is doing their job. When they are in power they forget what ministerial responsibility is except to inappropriately claim it in situations where it does not apply.

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for North Island—Powell River.

I have spent the last few months as a member of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women hearing powerful testimony from many survivors about their experiences within the Canadian Armed Forces. Sadly, I have also heard from those in positions of power that the systems, which have let so many women down, are in place and they are working. We have heard both in contradiction.

Earlier this year, after hearing brave servicewomen publicly share their stories, I felt compelled to bring forward a motion at the status of women committee that started the study of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces. I knew that the defence committee was studying the specifics of what happened regarding the Minister of National Defence's refusal to act on the allegations against General Vance and what went wrong with the process. With my motion, we on the status of women committee would focus on the women. We would hear their voices and work to put together what they needed to be able to truly serve their country equally.

We heard some heartbreaking evidence. We learned some gut-wrenching details. We heard witnesses openly contradict each other. We heard people in leadership deny that there is any problem. We also heard from some willing to work for change. So many people wrote to me desperately looking to me for that change and I desperately want to get it for them. However, will this motion today provide them with what they deserve and need? No, I do not believe it will. Do not get me wrong, I believe wholeheartedly that sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces needs to be openly discussed. It is our job in this place and in committees to ensure that we work toward a new culture for servicemen and women. That is why I brought forward that study at status of women committee.

The issue of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Forces is fundamentally about equality. As long as the sexualized culture that tolerates sexual misconduct remains in place, no one can serve equally. I and my New Democratic colleagues cannot support this Conservative motion because it would let the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence off the hook for their failure to act in 2018 until this date and would place the blame on one woman, saying she was responsible for the entire failure.

The defence committee needs to hear from the Prime Minister's chief of staff. Hearing one final witness will not unduly delay the work of the committee, especially if the result is that either the Minister of National Defence or Prime Minister finally takes responsibility. Pinning all of this on one woman is not right. In our democratic system, we elect political officials whose job it is to take responsibility. I cannot begin to express how incredibly disappointed I am to see how something that originally came to our attention from a brave woman trying to have her voice heard and her request for justice has devolved into a competition between the Liberals and Conservatives of who is worse when it comes to following an investigative process, a process that is clearly broken. Whenever the Liberals and Conservatives get involved in a debate about who failed survivors first or who failed survivors more, this does not serve the interests of survivors.

I am so proud to serve in this Parliament and to work with my colleague, the member for Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, on this issue. He serves on the defence committee and I want to quote him from last Friday's meeting because I cannot express it any clearer than he did when he said:

We have failed the survivors of sexual assault in the Canadian military. All of us have failed them by not getting policies in place not just to support them—because I think that's looking at the wrong end of the problem—but to change the culture and prevent there being such an inordinately large number of victims of sexual assault in the Canadian military.

When it comes to the issue of sexual misconduct, trust in the leadership of the Canadian Forces and the government is broken, but without restoring that trust, women in the forces cannot have confidence that true change will occur. Political leaders must show that they understand sexual misconduct and they will take action against it, but, sadly, we have seen no such leadership and no such action.

In fact, no action was taken against General Vance when he faced multiple allegations of sexual misconduct. Instead, he was appointed chief of the defence staff by the Conservatives and his term as

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CDS was extended by the Liberals, who also gave him a positive performance evaluation that resulted in a pay raise. The Conservatives placed him in charge of Operation Honour, the program that was supposed to root out sexual misconduct. He was left in charge of the program by the Liberals for three more years after they learned of sexual misconduct allegations.

No responsibility was taken when the Minister of National Defence was offered evidence of sexual misconduct by Vance from the military ombudsperson. Instead, he refused to look at it and referred it to the Prime Minister's Office, but no investigation took place and Vance remained in office. No amount of arguing about whether procedures were followed can disguise that fact.

● (1140)

The government failed to implement the key recommendations of Justice Deschamps' 2015 report, it failed to listen to the report from the Auditor General in 2018, and it did nothing with the report on this same issue from the Standing Committee on the Status of Women in 2019. The question is now whether the government will listen to and implement the recommendations from a second review of sexual misconduct.

The government has brought in task force after working group after committee, and now a review. This is a diversion. I certainly respect Justice Louise Arbour and have no doubt she will make a useful contribution, but there are outstanding recommendations by Justice Deschamps that could be acted on now. The issue of sexual misconduct is getting the attention it deserves finally. I have heard from current and former women members in the Canadian Armed Forces, and they hope now is the time there will be action. It amazes me that, after what these women have experienced and currently experience, they still have so much hope. They have made it clear we do not need more reports, more task forces or more empty apologies or promises. The only direction the government can take now is action. The current government has never seen a problem it cannot fix with a report. It believes that with one or more studies the problem is solved.

We all know, and I hope members of the government know as well, that only action will solve this problem. To my Conservative colleagues, I want to say that the firing of Ms. Telford will not solve this problem either. Only political will, leadership and courage to take action will create the change our servicemen and servicewomen in the Canadian Armed Forces need and deserve.

At the centre of this scandal and this problem is power. There is a quote from Aung San Suu Kyi: "It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it." We have a government that will do anything to hold onto power, that will hide behind others and behind processes, that will use excuse after excuse, and that will not take responsibility, because it may limit their power or they may lose it. We have leadership at the top of the command structure of the Canadian Armed Forces who thought they were untouchable, and this is not just about General Vance, but about that entire culture and the generations that have seen its growth and that scourge of power spread.

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Now, it seems impossible to change, for so many have been subject to it. That power has infected all relationships and workplaces. Sexual misconduct is about power, fear and punishment, but it is clear to me that the harder we cling on to power for the sake of power, the more we lose and that the only solution for us is to redistribute that power. The path toward equality in the Canadian Armed Forces, for women to be able to serve their country equally, is for all to share power. That is a culture change we need to see in both institutions: the Canadian Armed Forces and the Canadian Parliament. When the Conservative party introduces that motion, I will support it.

• (1145)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, I agree with most of what my colleague said.

Would she not agree that those in government who were in the highest positions of power and knew of the misconduct allegations against General Vance, but did nothing, should be held accountable?

Certainly, most of us agree that the Minister of National Defence does not have the credibility to continue to serve. He needs to be held accountable, but Katie Telford, if indeed she did know and covered it up, should be held accountable. People say that, because she is a woman in a position of power, she should not be held to the same standard as a man. Does my hon. colleague, as a woman, not find that to be somewhat sexist in and of itself and patronizing, and that somehow strong capable women should not be held to the same account as men when they are in positions of power?

If Ms. Telford knew, and she told the Prime Minister, Conservatives believe very strongly it is the Prime Minister who needs to own up to that and not throw her under the bus—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, I think the crux of that question is that yes, those in positions of power must take responsibility. I come back to a point in speech, which is that we elect people to those positions of power to be held accountable and responsible. The one woman at the crux of this is not an elected official. Therefore, for this, the place to put judgment is upon those men at the top who truly held the power.

In my office, I hold the responsibility for everyone in my staff, and I take responsibility, and that is what we are asking of the Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister in this case.

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 had the honour and privilege to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces in the eighties. It is difficult, as I am sure many regular force members and reservists who are listening to debates, and seeing what is taking place, know full well. It is such an honour to serve.

I am wondering if my colleague believes that maybe we could have been debating the issue at hand, the culture within the forces, as opposed to what appears to be politicizing the issue given the na-

ture of the debate. For example, I think there are things that we could have been—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member has used up his time. I am going to get him an answer so I can get to another question.

The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, again, I think that the member has to look no further than his own government, which has been fighting with the Conservatives about whose fault it is, or who started it. Take responsibility and stand up: That is the leadership the people in the Canadian Armed Forces need. Who wants to debate that? That is why I brought my motion forward at the status of women committee so that we could get to another report, sadly, that would inform the government on how to move forward actionably and make those changes that are necessary instead of fighting among ourselves.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

Someone needs to take responsibility. Everyone is throwing the ball in someone else's court and nothing is being done. I would like my colleague's thoughts on that.

Does she have any course of action to suggest?

Where should we begin?

• (1150)

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Madam Speaker, we all have to take responsibility now. This is upon all of us, so let us take those actions. There are some clear actions in the Deschamps report that could happen immediately, such as the independent investigative service, which is completely separate from all of the institutions that currently exist under the command structure, and ensuring that the ombudsperson responds and reports directly to Parliament instead of to the minister. That is a clear action that we have been calling for for years. There are clear things that can happen, and we need to move forward with those.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am not pleased to be here having this debate today. I am really disappointed that the Liberals did not just do the right thing, which is to keep the committee going and do the work that needs to be done there. The national defence committee should be hosting Katie Telford. Instead, we are in the House having this debate. Why is that the case? I guess that is a question that only the national defence committee chair can answer.

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I know some of my constituents might be asking why the defence committee needs to hear from the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Katie Telford. Here is the answer. We need to know who is responsible for the failure to investigate the 2018 allegation against General Vance, because that failure led to having him in office for three more years. Another factor is that the Prime Minister himself has suggested strongly that his chief of staff knows the answer to this very question. Therefore, that should be happening in committee where committee should be free to do its work.

Instead, we have a Conservative motion before the House today that is directing the Government of Canada to fire a woman who may have had some very important information but does not hold the power. Where is that power? It is in the hands of the Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister.

For the last several weeks, the House has heard a debate that all too often comes back to an interesting argument between the Liberals and the Conservatives as to who did worst and who is most to blame. This is a conversation that simply should not be happening. The conversation should be this: What do service women in the Canadian military need now to be safe and how soon can we get it to them? The issue at hand is the sexual misconduct in the Canadian Forces, which is happening all too often and which the leaders have failed to stop, that today and in the past, women in the Canadian Armed Forces have not been safe, and continue to not be safe.

Those brave women have answered the call to the Canadian Armed Forces because they believe in serving our country, because they are ready to put life and limb on the line for us, because they want to protect this country, our country. They literally put their lives in our hands as parliamentarians. If this place makes a decision, they have to go. If the Prime Minister makes a decision, they must follow it.

These brave women, their lives already on the line because of their service, are hoping to hear this place have a meaningful debate about how Parliament will work to stop the sexual violence that they are experiencing within their ranks. Today's solution is to fire a woman who works for the Prime Minister. Please tell me that this place can do better than that. It is these women who are asking us to make a change, to not argue back and forth but to get it done, to stop making promises, to stop committing to studies but to do something.

As a woman who has experienced sexual violence, believe me, I did not want another report. I wanted to know that someone would step up and stop it, would stand in solidarity with me so I was not alone facing these horrendous challenges. The women who serve us in the Canadian military have had to face sexual violence and sexual misconduct and then they have been asked to be in situations, be it in a war zone or in the midst of a natural crisis, where they need their team to have their backs. Every step they take, they have to rely on their team and that takes trust.

All too often, the reality of way too many service women is that they have had to have faith in the very person who assaulted them. Trust was a luxury they did not have.

Generation upon generation of women in the military did their job, even when their fundamental trust and human rights were be-

ing broken, and the House is debating whether it was the current Prime Minister or the past one who was most problematic, or was it the current Minister of National Defence or was it the last one? At this point, I do not care. What I care for is the action women in the military are calling on us to make.

• (1155)

Today's debate should be about equality. As long as the Canadian government does not acknowledge the reality that a culture that tolerates sexual misconduct remains in place, and means a woman cannot serve equally, we should all stop everything we are doing and start focusing on making it safe. Firing the Prime Minister's chief of staff will not fix that.

All parliamentarians should be reflecting seriously on the fact that the Conservative government put General Vance in the position he had and put him in the lead of Operation Honour, then the Liberals promoted him. All of them ignored the whispers they were hearing. Those whispers are always there.

Something profoundly wrong is happening. Stop asking military women not to blame this group but to blame that other group. In fact, can all of us in this place stop talking about blame? It is time we step up and talk about action, concrete action that makes women serving in the military know we, as parliamentarians, are standing in solidarity with them.

That is not another report. It is action. It is actually getting to work on the recommendations put forward and listening to the voices of service women who have faced sexual misconduct then and now. They can help guide us. I believe the amazing women who serve in the Canadian military need to hear all of us in this place acknowledge the realities they are living through.

If I were the Minister of National Defence or the Prime Minister, I would say this: On behalf of generations of parliamentarians, to all the women who served in the Canadian military now and in the past who experienced sexual violence, we are sorry. We are sorry we did not take the realities of your lives seriously, that we stood by and heard the whispers of sexual violence and turned away because we were too afraid to take action. We are sorry that when we ask so much of you that you are still allowed to work in a place where you are unsafe because of our silence. We are sorry, and I will commit that I will do something about it.

I want to talk about responsive action, because we owe it to the service women in the Canadian military. Many people have outlined the timetable today of the decisions made between the Conservative and Liberal governments. That timeline is absolutely devastating and it shows how many times these women in uniform have been betrayed.

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The facts are before us. On April 26, the Department of National Defence tabled a report to Parliament with statistics around Operation Honour. There were 581 reports of sexual assault over the past five years. There were 221 incidents of sexual harassment logged over the same period. These are the ones that were reported. We do not know how many were never spoken of.

All I know in my heart is that when we see something, we must act on it. This is what action looks like to me. Stop hiding behind saying, "It was not clear it was sexual misconduct". If someone is not sure and they are in a position of power, ask every time and assume the worst. Be relieved if it is not the bad thing, but stop hiding behind the silence of not knowing as it is literally destroying people.

Understand that our systems in Canada, both inside and outside the military, are built to support people in power and not the ones who are vulnerable. We are hard-wired to avoid things that are uncomfortable. If someone is in a position of power and is not uncomfortable, I assure them they are doing it wrong.

Change the internal systems in the military. If we want to root out sexual violence, then the government has to put systems into place that make sure there is power in the survivors' hands. Have supports in place and do it now. Too many female veterans have told me stories that keep me up all night. They are coming forward with sexual violence reports and then having to go to work with the person again. It is not okay, yet it is happening.

Women in the forces have basic human rights. They should have confidence that leaders both understand sexual misconduct and will take action against it. We owe it to them because they work so hard for us.

• (1200)

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her passion on this important topic.

The hon. member spoke about the importance of moving forward and taking action that would change the reality for women in the armed forces, and I completely agree with that. It seems to me, though, that part of the way we take action is to identify and hold people accountable.

We do have to ask these questions about who know, who took action and who did not take action. Unless we hold people accountable for not taking the action they should have taken, then it will be much harder to move forward, when people cannot be assured that there will be consequences for failing to respond.

That is where the motion comes from. It comes from a reality that people in the Prime Minister's office knew what was going on and a claim from the Prime Minister that he was not notified.

Does the member believe it is important to get to the brass tacks of accountability for who did not share information or who failed to act on particular allegations in an appropriate way?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely agree that we need to get down to this but, more important, we need to get those recommendations in place.

Our focus should be on the people who are the survivors, not on the chief of staff of the Prime Minister. Let the committee do its work, and hopefully the Liberals will stop filibustering.

Mr. Peter Julian (New Westminster—Burnaby, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the speech of the hon. member for North Island—Powell River was very passionate and eloquent speech. She is a very articulate spokesperson for all those serving in the Canadian military, particularly for women in the Canadian Armed Forces who put their lives on the line every day for our country, yet are subject, as she mentions, to hundreds of cases of sexual violence and sexual abuse. It is simply not something that any Canadian should sweep under the carpet. I find the finger pointing we have seen from the Conservatives and the Liberals regrettable and very saddening.

As she and the member for London—Fanshawe have pointed out, we have seen so many recommendations that would advance and move forward in a way that would ensure we would have a Canadian Forces that would not subject women in the military to this level of sexual abuse.

Why does the member think the government has not put in place any of those recommendations? Why does she think the government sees this as a communications exercise rather than doing its job and weighing in to put solutions into place?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I could not agree more. So many recommendations have been clearly outlined and would make a difference.

Both governments, Conservative and Liberal, repeating after one another and not addressing this issue is a question that only they can answer. They need to take it up. At the end of the day, the people who are paying the price for this are the women who are serving our military. People need to understand that these are some of the most fierce and amazing women, who are willing to jump out of planes to save people in situations that I cannot even imagine, yet we are letting them suffer. They are still showing up for duty.

Whatever government gets on this, these changes need to happen, because these women need to be recognized.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have two issues here. One is solutions. We do have solutions. In the last question, the member talked about some of the answers already being there.

We also have an issue of accountability. Clearly the Prime Minister does not hold the Minister of National Defence to account, because he is still in that position, and he clearly denies knowledge of the issue.

I am concerned about the lack of accountability at any level in the Prime Minister's office as well as the issue of moving forward on the very important recommendations that the government already has available.

• (1205)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely share that concern, that accountability keeps getting punted down the line. It is like the government is continuing to wait.

That is the whole system in Canada, quite frankly, and across the planet all too often. When women experience sexual violence or any type of violence, nobody wants to talk about it, because it feels uncomfortable for them. If we are not all uncomfortable, then we are not doing our job right. Right now, the most uncomfortable people are women facing sexual misconduct in the military.

I am calling on the government to do the right thing. I do not think this motion will get it. However, the minister absolutely needs to be accountable. Pretending that he does not know is not an answer.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the Conservative House leader.

Today, I will talk about three key issues. First, as the previous speaker just talked about, is accountability. The next is the actions we need to take to better understand where the process failed and how we collectively move forward. Finally, I will talk about leadership and unfortunate leadership failure in dealing with this situation.

I will talk about the accountability aspects first for both the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence.

The government has gone to great lengths to talk about ministerial accountability. I agree. Being accountable includes taking ownership of a respective department, office or staff.

When we talk about the Minister of National Defence, he is the one responsible for the whole of the department, including being the direct supervisor of the chief of defence staff and the ombudsman. He has talked at length about not interfering politically and respecting the independence of any investigation. I fully agree. I have personally been very vocal about the current Prime Minister's political interference historically with the independence of the prosecution and judiciary with the SNC-Lavalin affair, and how this was a great failure and should have never happened.

However, in the case we are debating today, the minister has forgotten that, as the direct supervisor of both the chief of defence staff and ombudsman, this goes beyond just the political realm. Further, there is a fundamental difference in ensuring that an investigation occurs and interfering in said investigation or even doing the investigation themselves.

The parliamentary secretary in her speech earlier during the debate, as other Liberal members have, stated that the Liberal government apparently followed the exact same process as the previous Conservative government. This is absolutely false.

Under the previous Conservative government, both the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service and the national security adviser were both involved, and investigations actually did occur in response to rumours. This did not happen at all with this current case with the Liberal government. The only thing that happened was a passing of the buck to the PCO and the clerk of the Privy Council, and nothing further occurred despite actually having an actual allegation presented to the ombudsman. In fact, the only thing that did occur was the chief of the defence staff getting his

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mandate extended, getting a raise and eventually becoming the longest-serving chief of defence staff in history.

The bottom line is that the Minister of National Defence admitted on March 12 in committee that he was responsible for the failures of these allegations being investigated, and the minister is accountable. However, really what we are here today for, and the what the motion before us is about, is to debate the lack of accountability in the Prime Minister's Office.

I have had the fortune and privilege of commanding hundreds of Canada's finest. I have been a chief of staff both in Afghanistan and Iraq along with holding other key staff appointments. When I was in charge, I always reminded my staff that I could only do my job if they kept me in the loop. The line I used to use was, "I can only stop the manure from rolling downhill if I know about it. If I don't know about it, it is really hard to stop it." However, when I was the chief of staff, my primary job was to keep the boss, the commander, in the loop, and this is what we are really talking about today.

In fact, we all know in this specific case that the office of the Minister of National Defence, the Privy Council Office, the Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister's chief of staff all knew about sexual misconduct allegations, yet somehow we are led to believe that the Prime Minister himself did not know. Based on this, I think we are faced with only two possible conclusions: either the Prime Minister did know about these allegations or his chief of staff failed to do her job to keep the Prime Minister in the loop. Either way, it speaks to incompetence within the Prime Minister's Office, and the victims of sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces are suffering as a result of these leadership failures.

Next, I want to focus on briefly the way ahead and why it is so important that these failures to hold those accountable are so important to the members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

I have been hearing from countless former colleagues within the forces. They are primarily concerned about the senior leadership both politically and militarily being held to account. They are concerned that if we do not fix it and we do not understand where those actual failures occurred, that there is no moving forward. We can ultimately put any process in place, but if somehow the senior leadership, especially the senior leadership politically, refuses to take action, then I do not know how anything will change moving forward.

● (1210)

It has been talked about before. The Canadian Armed Forces has the Deschamps report. I was there when it came in. Frankly, I was shocked at the length and depth in it of some of the details that occurred. One of the first things I did, being a serving member at the time, was talk to the female colleagues of mine and ask if it was true, if there was that much rampant sexual misconduct.

To be frank, I was shocked and disappointed that in so many cases within the leadership of the Canadian Armed Forces we were still allowing this to occur. I can only speak to the specific positions I was in, and I did everything in my power, but at the same time, I fully admit that I should have done more to create an atmosphere and environment where anybody could come forward with any type of allegation.

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Ultimately what we are debating today is that if these allegations, especially against somebody like the chief of the defence staff, do not get properly investigated and concluded, then we cannot move ahead. This is not about pronouncing guilt or innocence; this is about actually doing a proper investigation. It is all about this cover-up that is creating all the problems.

I do not disagree with the previous member's comments that the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence are ultimately responsible. However, in this case, if we take the Prime Minister at his word that he did not know, ultimately he needs to now show leadership, make the tough choice and remove those within his office who are preventing him from doing his job as the Prime Minister.

This is all about trust and accountability. The members of the Canadian Armed Forces, particularly the victims of sexual misconduct and harassment, need to know that they can have faith in both the senior political and military leadership to ensure this does not happen again going forward.

I do agree with the member for North Island—Powell River that more action is required. However, first, leaders, in this case the Prime Minister, need to show leadership, be accountable and find out why this failure occurred from his chief of the defence staff.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, as it is my first opportunity to enter into this discussion today, I am particularly grateful the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound focused on the larger issues, which I wish we were talking about here today. I also think the hon. member for North Island—Powell River made a fantastic speech. I agree with her sentiments.

For my hon. friend from Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, the Conservative motion is inappropriate and too narrowly focused on one individual and not the broader question.

I appreciate his raising of SNC-Lavalin again. We never got to the bottom of that. Cabinet intervened to stop the RCMP from fully investigating if an obstruction of justice had occurred, and some of the same questions were at play there. Why was the Prime Minister never properly briefed on the Shawcross doctrine? Why did he not understand that his then minister of justice, the hon. member for Vancouver Granville, had it right, and the various bought and paid for experts hired by SNC-Lavalin had it wrong?

Would the hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound agree with me that our time would be better spent on those issues, than on this very partisan, rather mean-spirited motion we have before us today?

• (1215)

Mr. Alex Ruff: Mr. Speaker, I respectfully disagree with the member's assertion. We need to get to the bottom of this. The hon. member brought up a number of key points and factors on other issues, other failures by the current Prime Minister and his team. Ultimately it speaks to why this motion finally needs to come forward. He needs to be held to account or he needs to make that tough decision and surround himself primarily with a chief of staff who will ensure he is properly briefed and properly prepared to do his job as Prime Minister.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his service. He probably understands better than many of us how important accountability is to the CAF. Yes, we need to come up with some long-term fixes. Some great recommendations have been ignored.

On the issue of accountability at the highest level, can he speak to that and the importance of it within our military?

Mr. Alex Ruff: Mr. Speaker, that is at the root of what my speech was about. It is all about being accountable. As a leader, this specific case is my greatest disappointment. I am hugely disappointed in everybody involved in this, in particular in the former chief of the defence staff. I do not understand how he felt he could be in uniform, hypocritically leading Operation Honour, while at the same time having allegations against him.

However, the failure of leadership by the Minister of National Defence, along with his lack of really wanting to be held accountable for this, is extremely frustrating, because I expected better from him. It is the same thing with the Prime Minister in this case. His team owes him the facts and all the answers. If he is not going to hold his team to account, then he is going to continue to face additional allegations and additional problems going forward.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was an important speech. I deeply respect and enjoy working with the member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound in this place. I am just wondering if he could speak to something that I feel is immensely important in this debate.

The reality is that right now is that this work should be happening at committee. Katie Telford should be in front of the committee. I think it is absolutely abhorrent that the Liberals are blocking that. Let us get the work done. Could the member speak to that?

Mr. Alex Ruff: Mr. Speaker, I 100% agree with what the member for North Island—Powell River has raised. I was so shocked yesterday, and “shocked” is the word to use, that the chair of the committee would cancel the committee that was going to debate this.

Having served in uniform previously, and having been in the committee room virtually, not necessarily asking questions until the last number of defence committee sessions, I am disappointed with the amount of filibustering and the lack of focus on what this issue is. This should be about getting answers. It is about figuring out the way forward and not stalling something that is so important for all the victims of sexual misconduct and harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of emotion that I take part in this debate since it is about the Canadian Armed Forces.

We have the privilege of living in a free and democratic country because there are men and women who ensure its security by serving in the armed forces and because men and women have fought in horrible wars so that we could live in a free country. My father, who will soon be 98, and millions of other people served in the Second World War. They liberated all of humanity.

In the Canadian Forces and in every army, trust needs to be instituted and real. If, by some misfortune, trust is broken, our men and women can no longer serve with as much passion and commitment because they wonder who they are working for and who they are serving. That is especially true for women who work in this setting who are victims of harassment. For them, the scars run even deeper.

Today's debate surrounds Canadians' faith in their army and the faith that members of the military must have in their leaders. We are debating this today because some serious problems have been reported at high levels of Canada's government and army. We are also trying to determine who knew what and when.

I am unfortunately referring to the scandal surrounding General Vance. He is currently at the centre of allegations of sexual harassment of women in the military. On the one hand, Canada's former chief of the defence staff failed in his duties, and on the other hand, the leader of the government said one thing only to be contradicted by his chief of staff. If we want to restore trust then we must get to the bottom of this situation.

What happened? Three years ago, on March 1, 2018, the Canadian military ombudsman informed the Minister of National Defence that allegations were made against the chief of the defence staff, General Vance. I want to emphasize the word "allegations" because this is not about rumours or hearsay. These were allegations of inappropriate conduct and sexual harassment against women in the military under his authority.

The next day, March 2, 2018, the PCO emailed the PMO with information about sexual harassment allegations against General Vance.

Three years later, the whole thing was exposed when a media outlet broke the story. The Prime Minister's initial statement to the House was that he found out about it on television. I am not calling the Prime Minister a liar, but he claimed he was not aware of it. That was the first version of the facts.

Later, he said people in his office were aware an investigation was under way. That was the second, modified version of the facts. Last week, the Prime Minister told the House that nobody in his office was aware that it was a sexual harassment complaint. The facts do not add up.

The Prime Minister said nobody in his office was aware of it, but an email dated March 2, 2018, confirms that his chief of staff was aware of the allegations of sexual harassment. It has to be one or the other. We cannot believe the Prime Minister if we believe the chief of staff, and we cannot believe the emails about the chief of staff if we believe the Prime Minister.

I have a lot of respect for the member for Papineau, who is also the leader of our government. I say "our government" because we are all Canadian citizens, and he is currently the head of the gov-

ernment. However, the facts do not add up. The versions do not add up. The evidence is there, but it is not consistent with what he said. The current government has been in office for six years. Not only did General Vance stay on the job even though he has been under investigation for three years, but he was also given a raise and his mandate was renewed. That is what the government decided to do about cases of sexual assault against women in the military.

● (1220)

Since that came to light, we have also seen a completely unacceptable cover-up by the Liberals and some of their co-conspirators. We will talk about that later. At the Standing Committee on National Defence, we have seen a lot of what is known as filibustering, which means that people talk for an excessive amount of time to prevent specific action from being taken.

I have been in politics for 13 years as member of the Quebec National Assembly and as a member of the House of Commons. In those 13 years, I do not remember seeing a committee chair suspend a meeting 13 minutes before the committee was scheduled to sit. Perhaps that has happened before, but if so, I do not remember it. Unfortunately, yesterday, we saw that happen when the Liberal member for Kanata—Carleton, the chair of the Standing Committee on National Defence, decided to cancel the committee meeting that was scheduled. That is unacceptable.

Also, last week, we saw the government very proudly announce that it would launch an inquiry to find out what is happening in the Canadian Forces with respect to cases of harassment. That work has already been done. Six years ago, our government launched an inquiry led by a Supreme Court justice. Her report, which she presented very confidently six years ago, in March 2015, revealed the devastating situation within the Canadian military and called on governments to take action. Six years later, what action has the government taken? None at all, but last week, it decided to redo the work that the committee had done six years ago. That is an admission of impotence. In fact, this plan was completely condemned by everyone. All observers said that the government's approach made no sense.

Today, our motion asks for the dismissal of the Prime Minister's chief of staff. It is essential that we be able to have confidence in our authorities and in our military leadership. Our defence staff has been particularly shaken by this situation. In my riding, there are thousands of soldiers stationed at the Valcartier military base who have spoken to me about this and who do not like what they see, but who want to get to the bottom of this.

On the one hand, the Prime Minister says that no one knew about it, but on the other hand, we have an email that says just the opposite. When the committee wants the Prime Minister's chief of staff to appear and testify, the committee gets shut down to prevent that.

Business of Supply

Canadians deserve very clear answers, which is why the deputy opposition leader raised a question of privilege last week on whether the Prime Minister misled the House. The Chair is currently examining the question.

My counterpart on the government side, my friend, the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier, vigorously defended his government for over 50 minutes yesterday. I do not begrudge him the time. However, the Liberals are always quick to criticize us for talking so much and say that we waste time. I am not saying he wasted our time. I am glad that he took the opportunity to speak. That is fine; that is what debate is for.

We also heard the member for Rivière-du-Nord say that the Bloc Québécois supports this inquiry and that it is important to get to the bottom of this. Those are the last kind words I will speak about my esteemed colleagues in the Bloc Québécois.

In this matter, they were on the wrong side of history twice. On April 12, 2021, at the Standing Committee on National Defence, the member for Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères voted with the Liberals to end the parliamentary investigation under way at committee. We can understand why the Liberals would not want an investigation. It is not dignified, it is not noble, but we can understand. Then, on April 12, 2021, the Bloc Québécois worked with the Liberals to prevent the parliamentary committee from considering this very important issue. It is disappointing.

We also understand that on February 9, 2021, again at the Standing Committee on National Defence, it was the member for Lac-Saint-Jean who co-operated with the Liberals to reduce the proposed number of days from five to three and who opposed inviting Zita Astravas, the Minister of National Defence's chief of staff, from testifying. If we want to get to the bottom of this, why did the Bloc Québécois support the Liberals twice at the parliamentary committee, once to put a lid on the issue and another time to reduce the time allotted for the investigation and to prevent someone who perhaps had something interesting to say from testifying? This is disappointing, coming from the Bloc Québécois. It is disappointing that they offered to collaborate with the government.

Let us not forget that, on March 10, 2020, Bloc and Liberal MPs voted together, hand in hand, to prevent the Ethics Commissioner from testifying at the ethics committee on the "Trudeau II report". The Bloc Québécois, hand in hand with the Liberals, muzzled the Ethics Commissioner to stop him from testifying.

• (1225)

That is why the Conservatives want to get to the bottom of things and want this motion to be adopted.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague.

I would like to take this opportunity to explain how a committee works. First there is a work plan and decisions to make on the urgency to act and there are also proceedings leading up to the vote. I think it is a bit of a shame when we rely only on the result of the vote because sometimes we get endless explanations on why a person voted yes or no.

I would like my colleague to tell me how asking the Prime Minister to fire his chief of staff for failing to inform him will change anything.

• (1230)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. I always appreciate her support in the House. That is why I am surprised that, as a woman and a proud representative for her constituents, she went along with her party's decision to work with the Liberals on not one, but two separate occasions.

The first occasion was when they kiboshed the investigation at the Standing Committee on National Defence and reduced the number of days allocated to hearing testimony. The second was when they refused to allow a witness to share her version of the events. That witness is not some nobody. It is the Minister of National Defence's chief of staff.

That said, it is her decision, just like it was her party's decision to vote with the Liberals to prevent the Ethics Commissioner from testifying. That is part of their record.

We need to be able to have confidence in our officials, which is why it is so important to get the facts straight when the Prime Minister says one thing and his chief of staff very clearly says the opposite.

I am sure that my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle was outraged to see the Liberals cancel the parliamentary committee's meeting yesterday. I am sure that she, like me, would have liked this woman to testify before the committee. The Liberals do not want that.

Who are we supposed to believe, the Prime Minister or his chief of staff?

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives say that this is an actionable item, that this is something that will help the government take that action to get results for women in the armed forces. Of course, we disagree with their motives and how they are doing it, but certainly we agree that action is necessary on this issue.

One of the things I have heard repeatedly, and that we have put forward repeatedly, is the need for the ombudsman to report to Parliament, to be more transparent in that regard, instead of what we have seen in terms of the problems of him reporting directly to the Minister of National Defence. Would my hon. colleague agree that it would be a really good step forward and an action that could be taken immediately by this House?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague for her participation in this very important debate.

We need to be frank and open with the reality. We need to know the truth. This is why the ombudsman's help would be welcome. However, we had a report that was published six years ago, which gave all Canadians, no matter which party we are, a road map to address this terrific issue of the fact that women in the army suffer sexual misconduct, especially in the highest ranks of the army. This is why we welcome each and every one to give us some advice. Let me remind members that six years ago we had the road map and the government failed to follow the road map.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to note that the Prime Minister is the one who used to say “sunshine is the best disinfectant” and that the Liberals would not resort to parliamentary games. Again, this motion is about accountability. Could my colleague, the House leader, talk about why we felt it was important for this motion to be put forward and for the Prime Minister to be held to account?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, I want to pay all my respects to my colleague from Kamloops, British Columbia, for whom I have a lot of respect. I am sad that she will not renew her mandate, but I wish her the best for the future, because she serves so well here in the House of Commons.

It is quite important to have confidence in our leader, so when we have the government leader, the Prime Minister of Canada, saying something here in the House of Commons but on the other hand we have the exact contrary of that, black on white, written directly to the chief of staff, we need clarity on that.

We just asked yesterday for the chief of staff to testify in the committee and the Liberal government decided to shut down the committee. This is awful. We need leadership. We need accountability to this Parliament.

• (1235)

[Translation]

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to share my time with the member for Hochelaga.

Every member of the defence team is entitled to be treated with respect and dignity in the workplace. It is also the responsibility of every member of the defence team, regardless of rank, position or title, even the top brass, to treat those around them with dignity and respect. We know now that this expectation is not enough.

Without rapid, decisive action, without strict enforcement and without accountability, sexual misconduct and harassment within the defence team will never be truly eliminated. We need to take a long, hard look at where our policies and initiatives failed. We have to learn from those we failed. We have to listen to them and make changes that really take our people and their needs and diverse backgrounds into account.

Last week, the Minister of National Defence launched an independent, external, comprehensive review of his department and the Canadian Armed Forces. I appreciate this opportunity to share details about this review with the House, including its aim, how it will be conducted and what it means for the defence team.

Business of Supply

There is a pressing need for accountability and review at every level of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence, not only from individual to individual and rank to rank, but also at the organizational level, by reviewing the policies and practices of the defence team and evaluating their efficacy at eradicating sexual misconduct and harassment.

The review that was announced last week will play a critical role in this analysis. It has several aims. We want to know why harassment and sexual misconduct persist within the Canadian Armed Forces despite considerable, concerted efforts to eradicate them. We want to identify barriers to reporting inappropriate behaviour. We want to know if the response is adequate when reports of misconduct are made. We want this information to be used to make recommendations on preventing and eradicating harassment and sexual misconduct in our armed forces for once and for all.

The Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces have chosen Louise Arbour to lead the review of the defence team's policies and culture. Madame Arbour's review will build on the report prepared by former justice Marie Deschamps, but it is not at all the same thing. Madame Deschamps's report made 10 key recommendations to address and eliminate sexual misconduct and harassment, but that was not enough.

Since then, the defence team has taken many important steps to implement Madame Deschamps's recommendations. Madame Arbour's review will build on the important work done by Madame Deschamps but will examine the issues from a broader perspective in order to help the defence team chart a path forward.

Madame Arbour's experience as a former Supreme Court justice puts her in an ideal position to carry out this review in a completely impartial manner. She will work independently from the chain of command of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence in order to remain neutral and ensure that the important work she is being asked to do will not be subject to any political influence. I think that we all agree that that would be inappropriate. Do my hon. colleagues not agree with me?

• (1240)

Madame Arbour's review will examine the policies, procedures and practices of the defence team. She will attempt to determine where the defence team's efforts to address and eradicate the problem of sexual misconduct and harassment are falling short. She will determine how these efforts must be strengthened and improved.

Business of Supply

As part of her review, she will consider all relevant independent reviews concerning the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. This includes evaluating the progress made by the defence team in implementing Justice Deschamps's recommendations. This evaluation will be coordinated with the Hon. Morris J. Fish, who is overseeing the review of the National Defence Act. The reports of the Auditor General and other internal audits will also have to be taken into consideration. She will examine their findings and recommendations.

In addition to considering these existing reviews, she will also evaluate organizational practices that, if effectively re-evaluated, could help prevent incidents of sexual misconduct. These practices include the recruitment, training, performance evaluation, posting and promotion systems of the Canadian Armed Forces.

She will also evaluate the policies, procedures and practice of the military justice system dealing with harassment and sexual misconduct.

More importantly, the review will be based on the views, accounts and experiences of current and former members of the defence team. All concerned members of the defence team deserve to be heard. Those who wish to share their experiences will be invited to provide input for Madame Arbour's review. Their names will remain anonymous. Madame Arbour will conduct her review without referring to specific cases of harassment or sexual misconduct in order to protect their privacy.

Her review will focus on women and members of the LGBTQ2+ community so that the defence team gains a better understanding of their perspectives and experiences. She will work with the Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism, Discrimination, LGBTQ2 Prejudice, Gender Bias and White Supremacy to reduce any unintended duplication of efforts.

Madame Arbour will put all this testimony together to identify signs that the defence team's culture promotes silence and complicity, how fear of reprisal acts as a barrier to reporting harassment and sexual misconduct, and any indication that the defence team's policies were applied inconsistently across the organization, as in the case of political influence in the appointment of General Jonathan Vance in 2015. As a matter of fact, even though there were rumours about him being the subject of an active investigation by the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service, the party opposite still appointed Jonathan Vance chief of the defence staff. All these factors will inform Madame Arbour's recommendations to the minister, the deputy minister and the Chief of the defence Staff.

Accountability and transparency are key to changing the culture and eradicating sexual misconduct and harassment in the defence team. These are the guiding principles of Madame Arbour's investigation. She will provide monthly progress reports to the Minister of National Defence, as well as interim assessments and recommendations. All of these assessments will be made public, as will the draft and final review reports.

Madame Arbour's reports will include a review of the defence team's policies and procedures, the causes and effects of barriers to reporting inappropriate behaviour, and an assessment of the sexual misconduct response centre's mandate and activities, independence

from the chain of command and response to reports of sexual misconduct.

Madame Arbour will also make key recommendations on the following points: preventing and eradicating harassment and sexual misconduct in the defence team, removing barriers to reporting, and establishing an external oversight body dedicated to resolving these types of incidents.

• (1245)

Once Madame Arbour has submitted her preliminary review to the organization, the minister, deputy minister and chief of the defence staff will have 30 days to respond to her findings and recommendations. Their responses and Madame Arbour's final review report will all be made public.

That is how we are creating the changes needed that—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question to the member is about accountability and the failure of information being passed to the Prime Minister in this case, with respect to allegations against the former chief of the defence staff.

It is my understanding the member is a member of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. What would she do if one of her staff had evidence, information or allegations of something that would undermine our national security intelligence, but the person just did not bother reporting it to her?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Mr. Speaker, what is important is that there is an independent, external, safe process for any person who has been subjected to sexual misconduct, so the person is able to make a report in an independent and safe process outside of the political process. That is what is important here. That is what is needed, and that is what we are working on.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I salute my colleague across the way. We serve together on the ethics committee, which we have heard a lot about in the last few minutes. My colleague, with several hours of speaking time at committee, did a good job of explaining the situation.

Let us look at what is really going on. What level of urgency and importance do we need to reach before they implement a plan of action, rebrand and make sure this never happens again? The urgency is clearly very high right now. A few years ago, not a few months ago, it was at minus 10.

I would like my colleague to explain what level of urgency is needed for them to act. It is clear that the official opposition needs to move a motion demanding a dismissal.

Is the government going to act?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague. We have had a number of conversations on topics that touch on the very subject we are discussing today.

What matters is acting on the problem before us. It is not about pointing fingers and blaming anyone. It is about the urgency of the matter before us. The fact is that we have appointed Justice Arbour, who is internationally renowned for her work, and, because of the work that has already been done by Madame Deschamps, we know that she will be able to create a plan to identify the problem and implement a process that works.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, former justice Louise Arbour's competence is not at issue here. This is about the Liberal government's ability to appropriately manage the crisis of sexual misconduct in the army. This is starting to look bad. The only thing they could think of was to redo an external investigation, even though Justice Deschamps did a similar review six years ago. The Liberals have done nothing in those six years.

My question is the following. Is the government putting this off, or is it simply trying to drop a hot potato?

• (1250)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his question.

Things that are very difficult to do cannot be done all at once. Madame Deschamps identified the problem. That is what we want Madame Arbour to investigate, to see what was done within the military chain of command.

Recent events have shown that there needs to be a process and that we need to determine how to make this process external. For the first time, all senior Canadian Armed Forces officers agree on the need for a process that is external to the Canadian Armed Forces.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the House for giving me the opportunity to contribute to today's debate on the efforts made by the Canadian Armed Forces to address the problem of sexual misconduct in their ranks.

Every day, members of the Canadian Armed Forces make enormous sacrifices to protect Canadians. When allegations of misconduct are made, the appropriate procedure must be followed. That is exactly what the Minister of National Defence did. In fact, he followed the same steps as the previous government in 2015.

As the former chief of staff for Stephen Harper, Ray Novak, said, when the leader of the official opposition at the time informed him of the allegations of sexual misconduct, these allegations were forwarded to the Privy Council Office for investigation.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*] who are the victims of sexual misconduct do not trust the process. We must do better. That is why Madame Arbour will formulate concrete recommendations on how to implement an independent external reporting mechanism outside the chain of command.

Business of Supply

Sexual misconduct can have devastating effects in the long term. Offering support to the people affected and ensuring their well-being must be our absolute priority.

This is also an incredibly complex social problem, and the Canadian Armed Forces know that they do not have all the answers. They need to be guided by the advice of experts in the field. The Minister of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces know that the only way to improve is to measure the progress made and to be accountable for their actions and decisions.

That is why we recently launched an independent external comprehensive review to determine exactly how and why our current culture allows such harmful behaviours and what we need to do to change this toxic culture of masculinity. That is also why budget 2021 earmarks funds to enhance support measures for those affected.

These measures include creating a new peer-to-peer support program and expanding the reach of the Sexual Misconduct Response Centre. Today I would like to talk about the exceptional work being done by the Centre under the direction of psychologist Denise Preston [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

The Deputy Speaker: There seems to be an issue with the hon. parliamentary secretary's bandwidth. I wonder whether she is using a fixed connection or a wireless one. Wireless connections sometimes cause this type of problem. If the WiFi network is not working properly, it is no better than a fixed connection.

I invite the hon. parliamentary secretary to continue, but her connection has already failed twice. Let us try again.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

• (1255)

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Mr. Speaker, I have a wired connection, but it appears that my area has been plagued by Internet problems for the past few days. I am sorry, but I do not have a better connection than the wire plugged into my device. I am truly sorry. I will try to continue as best I can.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

The Deputy Speaker: There appears to be a connection problem. I wonder whether we could call a technician to fix the problem. We will wait a moment until we find a solution.

For now, we will invite the next member to take the floor. We will ask a technician to call the hon. Parliamentary Secretary for the Minister of Transport. If we manage to fix the problem, I will ask the hon. parliamentary secretary to resume her comments on the motion before the House today.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I will be splitting my time with the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London.

This subject we are discussing today is of tremendous importance. We are talking of course about the situation arising from an epidemic of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Forces and a failure of government to address it.

We know in 2015 the Deschamps report was released, and after taking government in 2015, the current government was able to act on all the recommendations that were made by retired Supreme Court Justice Deschamps with respect to sexual misconduct in the Canadian Forces.

Here we are six years later, and amidst a political crisis the Liberal government is proposing a new review conducted by another retired Supreme Court judge into sexual misconduct in the Canadian Forces.

In 2018, the ombudsman for the CAF was made aware of allegations of sexual misconduct perpetrated by the then chief of the defence staff, the top soldier in the Canadian Forces, the top of the chain of command, so the ombudsman took these serious allegations to the minister responsible, the Minister of National Defence.

When the ombudsman advised the minister specifically this complaint and these allegations were of a sexual nature, that it was sexual misconduct, the Minister of National Defence heard it and then pushed away from the table. Following that meeting, he then made sure that information was passed to the Prime Minister's Office. We know from documents that the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Ms. Katie Telford, was made aware of the nature of these allegations of sexual misconduct alleged to have been perpetrated by the chief of the defence staff, Canada's top general, against one of his subordinates.

No more grievous a breach of trust or offence against those who have committed to serve could the CDS make than this. Members of our Canadian Forces serve our country under what is known as "unlimited liability". That means they can be given lawful orders to enter harm's way that could result in their death in service to this country. When they take their oath and agree to serve under unlimited liability, they expect rightly that not only will they be protected with all means possible and available by the chain of command, by the chief of the defence staff, they also rightfully expect their chain of command, Canada's top soldier, will not be the one who is taking action that would injure them or cause irreparable harm. Certainly not that they would perpetrate acts of a sexual nature in an inappropriate way.

The men and women of Canada's armed forces deserve to have a system much like is outlined in the Deschamps report of March 2015 that gives them the assurance they can serve their country without having to be subjected to sexual misconduct, harassment, crimes and other actions of a sexual nature particularly by their chain of command, by those senior to them.

The power imbalance in the military is textbook of course in what a power imbalance looks like because it is codified in the rank of those who serve, with the chief of the defence staff being at the top of that chain.

When those complaints brought to the ombudsman in 2018 were then given to the Prime Minister's chief of staff, action was required. Action was required by the Prime Minister's Office. The Prime Minister's Office had failed to act on those 2015 recommendations.

• (1300)

After years of lessons learned, and victims and survivors having to endure the system in the Canadian Armed Forces, those recommendations were made, and the government failed to act.

Then, in the face of those new allegations, again the government failed to act. What is worse, the Prime Minister has said he was not informed that there was this complaint and that his office did not know that it was a complaint of a sexual nature, that it was a #MeToo allegation. The facts simply do not support that contention. We know that Ms. Telford knew the nature of these allegations.

If the Prime Minister is to be believed, then we understand that along with the Minister of National Defence, the Prime Minister's chief of staff orchestrated a cover-up to protect the Prime Minister and to protect the aggressor, the individual alleged to have committed these offences, the then chief of the defence staff. This is unacceptable.

It is unacceptable that we ask everything, up to and including the lives of those who serve our country in uniform, and the accountability, or lack of accountability, that we are getting from the government does not even amount to a single person being fired for covering up this sexual misconduct.

The women and men in our Canadian Armed Forces deserve better. We owe it to them. We owe it to them to implement the recommendations from retired Supreme Court Justice Deschamps' report in 2015, before we embark on another review. Let us implement those. That is responsible. That is showing that we are listening. That is showing that we are acting. That is showing that we are standing up for victims, for those women and men who come forward, and those who have not come forward.

We know that simply failing to act because there is silence is tacit approval of the behaviour we know is going on behind closed doors. We have seen that with the suspensions and resignations of some of Canada's top soldiers.

The Canadian Armed Forces is a tremendously proud organization, and we should, as Canadians, be so proud of the women and men who serve and who have served. This is certainly the least we can do. We must hold those in the highest offices in this country to account.

If the Prime Minister's chief of staff orchestrated or participated in a cover-up to protect her boss, the Prime Minister, and to protect the Chief of the Defence Staff, so as to avoid an embarrassing political situation, then the Prime Minister must fire her. Then we need to hear from the Minister of National Defence about what he is prepared to do, how he is prepared to be accountable for what has happened.

The recommendations in 2015 were clear, the actions that the government failed to take in response to the evidence that was given to the ombudsman and the action that it did in covering it up is a blight. It is a stain on the government. It is a shame not worthy of the victims and survivors who brought that forward.

We are all very proud, and I am very proud, of our women and men in uniform. However, we need to demonstrate that pride with our actions. We need to demonstrate that this organization, those women and men, are worth protecting, that they are worth acting on the report that came out in 2015, that we do not have a government that is trying to trick Canadians into confusing motion for action. It is inappropriate to commission a new report without acting on the first report that was commissioned in 2015. We owe the victims that much.

It is time to demonstrate our pride and fulfill our commitment to the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces, like they do for us every day. The government needs to do that by taking action and holding people accountable for covering up serious allegations of sexual misconduct in our Canadian Armed Forces. It is absolutely the bare minimum we can do for the women and men of our Canadian Forces, and that is what we will be voting for on this motion.

• (1305)

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since I was called to order twice this morning, I will do everything I can this time to direct my questions to you.

I deplore the fact that the motion seeks only one thing: to find a scapegoat. A scapegoat will not do anything to address the willful blindness of both the Conservatives and the Liberals in this situation involving such a fundamental matter as victims of sexual assault in our armed forces.

My question for my colleague is this. Rather than looking for a scapegoat, does he not think that we should take immediate action to send a clear message to victims that parliamentarians are doing something about this?

• (1310)

[English]

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely believe we should take immediate action. The recommendations made in the report that was completed in 2015 by retired justice Deschamps are in the immediate arsenal of recommendations that can be acted on by the government. It absolutely can do that. That is a concrete step and an evidence-based approach that the government can take to address sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces, but people must be held accountable, and it is to the Prime Minister to hold those individuals accountable. If, through his interventions and re-

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sponses he has said that his chief of staff kept this information from him, then that individual is the first to be held accountable for orchestrating a cover-up of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Forces.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we look at this, what the military is really looking for is leadership and action. I am just wondering this. Do the Conservatives agree that the time has finally come for the National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces ombudsperson to be made a fully independent officer of Parliament, with the ability to independently investigate matters such as these?

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for her advocacy for the women and men in the Canadian Forces and for veterans.

Step one is to implement the recommendations from the 2015 Deschamps report. The next step is absolutely to look at the powers and the reporting structure for the ombudsperson for the Canadian Forces and make sure we do not have a situation where we have to have the minister, the PCO or the PMO acting on this, because we have seen a failure to act.

I think we need to put all the options on the table and we need to address those who failed to act. At the same time, the recommendations from 2015 are available immediately for the government to act on, and it can do that concurrently with the new report it has commissioned.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government sat on serious allegations of sexual harassment at the highest level for over three years. The Bloc is stating that it believes this motion is about scapegoating.

Could my colleague talk about how this is about accountability at the highest level of government? It is not about scapegoating on very serious allegations.

Mr. Michael Barrett: Mr. Speaker, it is vital that we hold people accountable for failures of this nature. This is the most grievous situation: The top soldier in the chain of command is alleged to have perpetrated sexual misconduct on one of his subordinates. That is the greatest example of a power imbalance in this type of situation that one could imagine, so we must hold all of those accountable who covered it up.

We have heard that the Prime Minister was not informed by his chief of staff, though she knew. Therefore he must hold her accountable, and if there are others who were part of that cover-up, he must hold them accountable as well. If he fails to, Canadians will hold him accountable.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my great colleague from Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes who not only serves as a member of Parliament but has also served in the Canadian Armed Forces. I thank all of those who have served.

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I am truly honoured to speak to this important opposition day motion. As the former chair of the status of women committee in the 42nd Parliament and a portion of the 43rd Parliament, and former shadow minister for women and gender equality, I say that this motion today is extremely important.

The investigation into General Vance, the treatment of our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces and the culture of sexual misconduct must be investigated thoroughly. This begins at the very top, and that is exactly what we have brought forward today. Today's motion reads:

That, given that:

- (a) women and all members of the Canadian Armed Forces placed their trust in this government to act on claims of sexual misconduct;
- (b) the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff was informed about a specific sexual harassment allegation against General Jonathan Vance three years ago;
- (c) the Prime Minister asserts that this sexual harassment allegation was never brought to his attention; and
- (d) the Prime Minister said that those in a position of authority have a duty to act upon allegations, the House call upon the Prime Minister to dismiss his Chief of Staff for failing to notify him about a serious sexual harassment allegation at the highest ranks of the Canadian Armed Forces and for being complicit in hiding the truth from Canadians.

We can talk about timelines, which I know that many of the members speaking to this motion today will do. They will talk about the promotion of General Vance and former investigations, but most importantly they will talk about the top office in our country knowing of these allegations and doing nothing.

To begin, when we first started hearing about these allegations months ago following media reports, the PM indicated that his office knew nothing. We know, after testimony presented at the defence committee by a former adviser to the PMO, that this was not true. Katie Telford, the chief of staff to the Prime Minister, was aware of the allegations and was aware of the sexual nature of these allegations. The person who came forward as having an intimate relationship with General Vance was aware of the mindset, his personal views of his position and status within the Canadian Armed Forces, and the leadership within our country. She came forward to speak about what she saw and what she thought.

An article written by David Pugliese on April 22 is titled, "Gen. Vance boasted he was 'untouchable' by military police, Commons committee told". This article states:

Canada's former top soldier boasted that he was untouchable and that he "owned" the military police who are investigating allegations of sexual misconduct made against him.

We know, following testimony by military ombudsman Gary Walbourne in 2018, that an allegation of inappropriate behaviour was brought forward, and that chief of staff Katie Telford and the Minister of National Defence were both aware of this claim. Although the Prime Minister is indicating that nobody knew this was a #MeToo moment, email threads disprove that. Sexual harassment does equal a #MeToo moment.

I want to go back to my role as the chair of the status of women committee and the work that we had completed in a study tabled in June 2019. Unfortunately, I do not have a response from the government or from the minister on this. They were allocated 120 days to respond. We were short by a few days because we had gone into

an election, so we never received a response on this. I would be very interested to hear what the defence minister would have to say about this.

I share with members some of the testimony, and why an allegation that was taken to the top office of our country and not acted upon was truly negligent. I want to talk about Operation Honour. Throughout the study on the treatment of women within the Department of National Defence, we heard a lot about this program and that it was a clear mandate. It states:

1.6. Operation HONOUR is the mission to eliminate sexual misconduct in the CAF. It is based on the principles that:

- a. every member who serves their country deserves to be treated with dignity and respect—anything less is simply unacceptable; and
- b. any attitudes or behaviours which undermine the camaraderie, cohesion, and confidence of serving members threatens the CAF's long-term operational success.

1.7. Operation HONOUR seeks to achieve a positive institutional culture change in the Canadian Armed Forces through four lines of effort:

- a. understanding the issue of sexual misconduct;
- b. responding more decisively to incident;
- c. supporting affected persons more effectively; and
- d. preventing incidents from occurring.

● (1315)

General Vance, addressing the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence in June 2018, stated:

Leaders need to drive change by providing vision and a consistent personal example that empowers and inspires subordinates to set the conditions for the elimination of sexual misconduct.

We listen to those words now, reflect on what we are talking about today and wonder who was in charge of that candy jar.

In the manual for Operation Honour under "Bystander Intervention Training", it states the following:

[Canadian Armed Forces] Bystander Intervention unit-level training helps CAF members recognize and react decisively to sexual misconduct and harassment when they see it. This program illustrates to bystanders and leaders that if they fail to act when faced with an incident of sexual misconduct, they are perpetuating the behaviour. The program also explains the power that bystanders and leaders have to take positive action to stop sexual misconduct and support CAF members. In short, it demonstrates why it is crucial for witnesses to sexual misconduct to speak out against it, rather than stay silent.

The most ironic thing about all this is that this program was launched by General Vance. This program about what we needed to do when our members were facing sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces was led by General Vance. We heard from many former members of the Canadian Armed Forces who described their time in the forces and their own personal experiences. Why do I want to bring this forward? I want trust and confidence in our government, accountability and assurance that this will never happen again.

In testimony brought forward by former Canadian Armed Forces member Paula MacDonald, she stated the following:

When I was in basic training, I called the Canadian Armed Forces sexual response centre to ask them to help me. All they did at that time was the same thing that the ombudsman would do, which was to direct me back to the mechanisms within the Canadian Armed Forces that would deal with the abuse, so they directed me back to the individuals who were sexually harassing me to resolve the issues. There is no way you can resolve the issues with someone who is trying to do that to you.

Paula is no longer a member of the Canadian Armed Forces, but she does continue to have these conversations with members. She is quoted in that testimony also indicating the following:

It's still that way. I've asked them, and I've been following along with the changes to see how it's been evolving. The sexual response centre still refers the information to the chain of command. The individuals who were involved in direct positions that created incidents that I think are considered human rights violations.... They did a cabinet shuffle and moved them into positions that were to deal with Operation Honour.

Paula MacDonald's resolution would be to have a new reporting structure and to have people report "directly to the Minister of National Defence, as opposed to the chain of command in order to ensure that the harassment policies and procedures are being followed through."

We look at this and understand that there has been so much discussion on this. There have been so many changes and so much socialization over the last number of years. We recognize that. I am looking at the fact that we are not doing anything right now about what is negatively impacting our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces, and we should be doing more.

I wanted to quote something that Dr. Alan Okros stated during the committee. He said:

A common phrase among young Canadians these days is "check your privilege". An old phrase among military officers is "RHIP", which means rank has its privileges. There's a culture clash.

This is important. We know, as members of Parliament, that there are issues with reporting. Why is this? It is because nothing ever gets done. We have studied this and talked about violence against women. We have talked about sexual harassment in the workplace and we have talked about #MeToo. When this is taken up to the very highest level of our government, when this is taken to the PMO, nothing is done.

Of General Vance, Major Brennan said, "In my experience, in many different areas, the law does not apply to him." When someone like General Vance is in charge of a program, why would people not feel that they have no option but to take it to the Minister of National Defence or to the Prime Minister's Office? When they know that this is not working they have no other options.

Why does this land at the Prime Minister and Katie Telford? We know that individuals had gone there and that they were looking for assistance. They needed to bring this to the PMO, and the PMO did nothing. I bring us back to the operation and the top of the chain of command at the Canadian Armed Forces: The chief of the staff for the PM knew and remained silent, according to the Prime Minister, as he was not aware of this.

The bottom line is the Prime Minister's Office failed our Canadian Armed Forces. It failed Canadians and ultimately failed any woman here in Canada. It has turned a blind eye, and I believe that

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the Prime Minister's Office should speak and be open about this finally.

• (1320)

[Translation]

Ms. Louise Chabot (Thérèse-De Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her comments.

Among other things, she wondered about the reason behind the investigation into General Vance. I see that she is very concerned about this investigation.

Why was the Conservative party not as concerned at the time? The fact that the leader of the Conservative party back then was informed of the allegations of sexual misconduct against General Vance did not prevent him from appointing him chief of the defence staff.

How can she be concerned about an investigation now, when the Conservative party did not seem to be concerned at the time? Why lay the blame on an employee? That could set a serious precedent.

• (1325)

[English]

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, I know the member has asked this question of many members of our party. The fact is that we know there was an investigation in 2015. We know that the former prime minister spoke to General Vance. As indicated by the testimony we heard at the status of women committee, there was this idea that General Vance was not telling the truth. That was also reported at the defence committee a few weeks ago. The fact is there was an investigation. It was different.

Here we are seeing that this was taken to the Prime Minister's Office in 2015, when the Prime Minister's Office was actually just opening and started questioning. They just said no and shut the door on the entire inquiry.

The chief of staff, Katie Telford, is the most powerful woman under any elected official. She is the chief of staff for the Prime Minister who runs this country. Somebody needs to be accountable.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Elgin—Middlesex—London for her speech. I have a lot of time for the member. However, I have to ask why the Conservatives believe that this is the right course of action.

The member mentioned how complicit the Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister are, but this is a motion to fire the Prime Minister's chief of staff, one of the few women involved in this whole mess. The real issue is the inaction of the Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister, who have allowed for the continuation of a sexualized culture that tolerates sexual misconduct among the military's top brass. Why pick Katie Telford?

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, I too have great respect for the hon. member and love working with him. I look at the fact that we are not just talking about any old staffer, or about somebody that happens to be in my MP's office, or somebody doing communications.

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We are talking about the number one staff person here in Canada. She is the chief of staff to our Prime Minister. Yes, ultimately the Prime Minister is 100% responsible, he and the defence minister, but maybe we will see the Prime Minister stand up for Katie Telford and actually start to tell the truth. Perhaps this is a way of calling his bluff.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I found it very helpful to have my hon. colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London's perspective on the conflict and cultures around "check your privilege" and how rank has its privileges. I thought that it was quite brilliant, but I cannot agree that this motion is at all appropriate.

It is concentrating on one single person when we do not have all the facts, and getting the facts matters. I do not even think we ever got the facts on the SNC-Lavalin matter. This is a question of what happens in the Prime Minister's Office and in the Privy Council Office. Let us get to the bottom of things that matter. This looks like a very personalized and pretty uncomfortable attack to spend a full day on in the House of Commons.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the hon. member's question on this. What we have to look at is what have we been seeing every year. It is the Aga Khan one year, SNC-Lavalin another, and then it was who will be getting stuff during this pandemic. We have seen over and over again what the Prime Minister's Office is doing. When it comes to transparency, it is something that the PMO does not do well. When it comes to accountability, the Prime Minister pushes it off on everybody else.

I very much respect the member's personal opinion on this, but I think we finally need to get accountability from the PMO. This may be the way we get there.

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate.

Fortunately, the technical issues experienced by the hon. Parliamentary Secretary for the Minister of Transport are now resolved. She can now make her speech, and then there will be time for questions and comments.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport.

• (1330)

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Mr. Speaker I will continue with my speech.

The sexual misconduct response centre is independent of the military chain of command and answers directly to the deputy minister of national defence. Also, there is no reporting relationship of any kind between the Centre and the Canadian Armed Forces or the Chief of the Defence Staff.

However, that does not mean that the centre is any less attentive to the needs of Canadian Armed Forces members. Centre counsellors listen without passing judgment. They devote an unlimited amount of time to each call, and they take the callers' feelings, needs, concerns and fears into account.

The Department of National Defence recognizes that some people affected by sexual misconduct are not prepared to report it. The

centre offers these people someone to turn to. It is a place where they will be listened to and find answers, advice and, especially, the help they need.

Since the centre's counsellors are civilians, they are not required to report incidents like military members are. As a result, all interactions are confidential, and Canadian Forces members can get support services without having to provide personal information. Lastly, if someone decides to report an incident, the centre's team can help that person get in touch with the appropriate organization, whether it is the military police, the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service or the local authorities.

In August 2019, the sexual misconduct response centre launched a new response and support coordination program. This program offers members of the Canadian Armed Forces who are affected by sexual misconduct the services of a dedicated coordinator who provides ongoing support and the assistance they need every step of the way. The dedicated coordinators help them find information and provide referral services. They advocate for, support and accompany victims as they progress through the system. They also help with workplace accommodation and offer other forms of assistance depending on the military members' needs.

The sexual misconduct response centre can also call upon a military liaison team, made up of a military police liaison officer, a military counsellor and a military liaison officer. These members work exclusively for the centre and are specialists in their field. They can therefore advise military members on how to file a complaint or explain how the investigation process works. They can also help report the incident if the military member chooses this option.

Each person has unique needs, and each person's situation and concerns are different. The people at the centre take all this into account when they provide support. They can also put people affected by sexual misconduct in touch with a vast network of services across the country, including health services, chaplains and regional support centres for victims of sexual assault.

The sexual misconduct response centre is there to refer people to the help they need. In addition, the SMRC is drafting a national victim support strategy, as well as other programs aimed at better serving affected military members. In everything it does, the SMRC always makes sure to consult military members affected by sexual misconduct, as well as external experts. That way, it can be sure that it is meeting the needs of the people who have suffered harm and that it is basing all of its programs on evidence and best practices.

The SMRC is supported by an external advisory council made up of independent, impartial third-party advisors with significant, relevant expertise. Together, these organizations offer a wealth of knowledge, viewpoints and experiences.

The SMRC relies on this expertise to provide senior officers with advice and recommendations in order to help shape the Canadian Armed Forces' policies and programs concerning sexual misconduct. Its staff also provide advice on how to assess and report on the effectiveness of programs. The SMRC is a leader in research and best practices in the area of support and prevention strategies.

The SMRC also fields calls from senior officers and supervisors who are looking for advice on the process to be followed to intervene in the event of an incident and offer support to their personnel. Moreover, as part of the final settlement agreement in the CAF-DND sexual misconduct class action, the SMRC is responsible for developing and implementing a restorative engagement program.

This program is intended to offer class members safe, flexible options for sharing their experiences of sexual misconduct with senior defence officials and discussing the causes and impacts of these experiences. The program will give these people a chance to be heard and acknowledged. It will make it possible to start the process of rebuilding damaged relationships and restoring trust. It will contribute to changing the culture by helping leaders gain a broader understanding of the impact of sexual misconduct, their collective responsibility for the current culture, and the role they must play to create change.

• (1335)

The SMRC works tirelessly to help victims of sexual misconduct. Its team is dedicated and, most importantly, independent. It is one of the key tools at the Department of National Defence's disposal to address this issue.

Since 2015, the team has grown and changed, assuming greater responsibility and helping to shape Canadian Armed Forces interventions in the area of sexual misconduct. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of its members for their efforts to help people affected by sexual misconduct over the past six years.

[English]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a question about the relationship between individual failure and system failure. It seems to me, for victims to be heard and to receive justice, the system has to be working and the individuals within that system have to be working. Clearly, if there is no system for making complaints, then we have a problem, but even if the system is perfectly designed, if individuals fail to act as they should within that system, or if people who hear these complaints do not respond appropriately to them, it does not matter how good the system is because, if the individuals who have to carry out the requirements of the system are not taking action, then we have a problem.

It seems to me that this is the case of what happened with General Vance. There were very clear individual failures. Individuals had information that they did not use. The defence minister was told information, and he pushed back from the table and said that he did not want to hear it.

I appreciate that the member spoke about systems and structures that should exist, but the question of individual failure, I think, needs to be addressed as well. I wonder if the member can speak to her view of the actions of the defence minister, in particular, in re-

sponse to having heard allegations and choosing not to deal with them.

[Translation]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I share some of his opinions. We all recognize that bold action must be taken to change the current culture of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces.

The process that was followed in this case is the same as the process that was followed by the previous government. However, we recognize that the process is not working, so we need to change it, strengthen it and implement new measures. That would enable us to avoid ending up in this type of situation. The process must be independent from the army and free from political influence. We also need to ensure that the process will protect victims from now on.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my riding neighbour for her speech.

I am wondering why the government waited so long and why it waited until it was under pressure before calling for this investigation. Why did the government not take action from the very start? Why did it not act right away? The mandate of the inquiry includes a number of things that could be done right now.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Mr. Speaker, I thank my riding neighbour for his question.

That is why I spoke about the sexual misconduct response centre, which already provides services to the military and has been doing so since it opened in 2015. We took action six years ago.

We know that we need to go further. We know what we have to do, and the mandate that has been given to Justice Arbour is to ensure that things are done in such a way that the rights of victims are always protected within the structure of the Canadian Armed Forces.

• (1340)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my riding also neighbours that of the member for Hochelaga.

I find it appalling that, during their six years in power, the Liberals let a really dangerous situation fester while women in Canada's military had to endure difficult work environments and some were victims of sexual misconduct. The Minister of National Defence misled a parliamentary committee, a former ombudsman contradicted him, and then the minister pointed fingers at the PCO and tried to hide behind it.

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Now the Liberals' sole response is yet another external review. In football terms, I would say they are punting this issue so they do not have to deal with it anymore.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my other riding neighbour for his question.

I have to disagree with my colleague about something. I always enjoy football analogies despite the fact that they are very masculine, but I would like to remind him that we introduced Canada's very first strategy to prevent and address gender-based violence. We took action by investing in tools to defend victims' interests.

Ultimately, everything we do is geared toward ensuring that victims are protected. That is what we have been doing since taking office. We have taken steps to defend women who are victims of harassment and tackled deeply entrenched organizational cultures.

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my good friend, the member of Parliament for Oakville North—Burlington, whom I have the privilege of working alongside on so many issues, including in committee on public safety.

Once again, I am thankful for the opportunity to rise today to address the House on a subject that concerns all of us: the well-being of the members of our Canadian Armed Forces and those who support them.

In recent months, Canadians have heard the heart-wrenching accounts of Canadian Armed Forces members and civilian colleagues who have been subjected to behaviours, treatment and experiences that are completely unacceptable. For far too long, their accounts have been ignored.

For instance, opposition members knew of the rumours against General Vance in 2015, yet still appointed him. They appointed him while there was an active Canadian Forces national investigation service investigation into him, and appointed him to the most senior position within the Canadian Armed Forces. The current leader of the official opposition said that he passed along sexual misconduct rumours about General Vance in 2015, claiming those were looked into. I ask my fellow Conservative members, how is this possible, if General Vance was appointed at the same time and the investigation was suddenly dropped?

What our members have endured is wrong. The Canadian Armed Forces is entrusted to keep Canadians safe at home and abroad. The organization owes survivors more. Every Canadian Armed Forces member makes enormous personal sacrifices to protect Canadians and, regardless of rank or gender identity, has an undeniable right to serve in safety. We must and we will live up to that expectation.

The Minister of National Defence has always followed the processes that were put in place when allegations were brought to his attention. This is something he has said publicly, in this House, and it is something he will continue to do. However, as members have no doubt heard from my hon. colleagues, our government is taking important steps to address systemic misconduct within the Canadian

Armed Forces to bring about cultural change within the organization.

The need to change the military's culture is born of the reality that the lived experiences of many defence team members are completely out of line with the values professed within the organization and by the organization, which are values of integrity, inclusion and accountability. That needs to change, and we are committed to bringing about that change.

If we want that change to be significant, if we want it to be meaningful and if we want it to last, then we need to reflect honestly on what has been happening. Where we find failings and fault, we must accept responsibility. Where we are able to learn lessons, we must seize the opportunity to build a better organization. Where members of the defence team share their accounts and experiences, we must listen and we must listen very carefully.

The end goal is simple. It is to ensure that every member of the defence team, every member of the Canadian Armed Forces is valued and respected. Defence culture and professional conduct must reflect the core values and ethical principles our military aspires to uphold as a national institution, which is what Canadian Armed Forces members, veterans, recruits, public servants and Canadians deserve and expect of the organization.

It is clear that the measures we have taken already since forming government have not gone far enough and have not moved fast enough. This is why we announced last week that Madame Arbour will conduct an independent review into the Canadian Armed Forces, including the creation of an external reporting system that is independent from the chain of command and meets the needs of those impacted by sexual misconduct and violence. It is also why, in budget 2021, we committed over \$236 million to eliminate sexual misconduct and gender-based violence in the Canadian Armed Forces, including expanding the reach of the sexual misconduct response centre and providing online and in-person peer-to-peer support. All options to create a safer future for women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces are going to be considered to change the culture of toxic masculinity that exists in the Canadian Armed Forces.

• (1345)

Last Thursday, the Minister of National Defence announced the creation of a new organization to lead us there. Among the many other initiatives I just talked about, the Department of National Defence appointed Lieutenant-General Jennie Carignan as DND's new chief of professional conduct and culture. Under her leadership, the professional conduct and culture organization will unify, integrate and coordinate all of the policies, programs and activities that address systemic misconduct and support culture change within the forces. The organization will include a new assistant deputy minister who will directly support Lieutenant-General Carignan. The team will bring together members from all ranks and classifications, reflecting the diversity that Canadians expect. Make no mistake. This is not a generic prepackaged solution to a long-standing problem. Before any future steps are taken, those working to bring about change will actively listen to the accounts of people affected, people at every rank, every level and across all regions of this country.

As so many members of the defence team have already shared experiences and recommendations, we do not have to wait before implementing a number of much-needed changes. Lieutenant-General Carignan and her team will take a number of steps to bring about change right away. To start, they will wrap up Operation Honour. Much has already been said about drawing this initiative to a close, but it bears repeating. Lieutenant-General Carignan and her team will review all of the research conducted under Operation Honour so its findings can inform renewed culture change efforts.

This new team will also develop mechanisms to implement the workplace harassment and violence prevention regulations of Bill C-65. It will also support ongoing efforts to bring the remaining provisions of Bill C-77 into force. This includes introducing the declaration of victims rights into the National Defence Act.

The next order of business will be to form a team to establish a framework that will help achieve a number of longer-term goals. It will realign responsibilities, policies and programs that address elements of systemic misconduct across National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. It will also simplify and enhance misconduct reporting mechanisms, including for people outside of the chain of command. It will give greater agency to, and strengthen support mechanisms for, those who have experienced misconduct. It will enhance tracking mechanisms, from initial reports of the misconduct to case closures. It will also integrate additional data points, such as intersectionality, reprisals, member satisfaction and retention. Finally, it will lead institutional efforts to develop a professional conduct and culture framework that tackles all types of harmful behaviour, biases and systemic barriers.

So much work has already been done within the department to build healthy, safe and inclusive workplaces. So many organizations are focused on developing programs and policies to move us in the right direction, whether it is the gender-based analysis plus, the integrated conflict and complaint management program, the anti-racism secretariat, the Canadian Armed Forces diversity strategy, Canada's anti-racism strategy or Canada's national action plan on women, peace and security.

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The professional conduct and culture organization is being established with the clear understanding that previous culture change efforts have fallen short of what was needed. With the standing up of this new organization, the defence team is taking a fundamentally different approach, an approach that will be more holistic and coherent in addressing the complex challenges faced by the Canadian Armed Forces.

In closing, I would like to reiterate our deepest concern for the well-being of every member of the Canadian defence team. The standing up of the professional conduct and culture organization is a testament to our genuine commitment to protect members of the Canadian Armed Forces. Our government has shown that we are dedicated and committed to creating a lasting culture change across the defence team. That is the goal, and we will do just that.

• (1350)

Mr. Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia—Headingley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member's speech clearly recognizes there is a problem and proposes solutions, and I do not question her sincerity at all. I find myself again thinking that this is a speech the Minister of National Defence should be giving, but to the contrary, when he was interviewed by Mercedes Stephenson on the weekend, he was asked five times if he knew the allegations were around inappropriate sexual behaviour and he refused to respond.

How can the government solve a problem when the Minister of National Defence will not admit there is one?

Ms. Kamal Khara: Mr. Speaker, our government has absolutely no tolerance for misconduct. We followed, and the Minister of National Defence followed, the proper process, which is the same process the previous government followed.

I find it hypocritical for the Conservative Party to ask questions about what could have been done and what did not happen. The current Leader of the Opposition was made aware of the misconduct rumours back in 2015. It was serious enough that he asked his staff to notify the former prime minister's chief of staff, who then took it to the Privy Council Office for review. In other words, the same steps we followed.

How can the Leader of the Opposition seriously have members of his party stand and decry this process, the same process he took?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we have been hearing the same question for several hours now. I will approach the issue from a different angle. I was just elected in 2019, so I have to learn on the job, but I also have to look at what happened in the past, when I was not in the House of Commons.

Statements by Members

However, something has become clear to me. Earlier, I asked what the level of urgency or importance was for such a specific topic, with such serious repercussions for our image of the armed forces. All of a sudden, the government decides it may act, and act better. After an election, there are things that we would like to see happen.

Why must we always wait until the government's back is up against a wall? Unless it is the eleventh hour, there is no action on their part. This is serious. The government should have acted long ago.

It is never too late, but what will the government actually do?

• (1355)

[English]

Ms. Kamal Khera: Mr. Speaker, in my comments earlier, I talked a lot about what we had been able to do, but certainly there is a need to do a lot more, because the system did fail. That is why, along with the work we were able to do last week, we announced that Madame Arbour would conduct an independent review into the Canadian Armed Forces, including the creation of an external reporting system that would be independent from the chain of command and would meet the needs of all those impacted by sexual misconduct and violence.

It is also important for me to recognize that in budget 2021, our government committed \$236 million to eliminate sexual misconduct and gender-based violence in the Canadian Armed Forces, including expanding the reach of the sexual misconduct response centre and providing online and in-person peer-to-peer support.

We have been able to do a lot of work, but we also know a lot more work needs to be done. That is why we have taken the steps I mentioned in my speech to address them.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Deschamps report came out in 2015 under the Conservative government, which did not implement it. The Liberals have been sitting on those recommendations for six years. Now they are up against the wall and they say they will take action. However, they are not going to implement the Deschamps report; they are going to have another review. They are going to make another framework.

Why did the Liberals not implement the reforms of the Deschamps report when they took power in 2015?

Ms. Kamal Khera: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, and as the Minister of National Defence has always said, first and foremost, there is absolutely no tolerance for misconduct.

I agree with the member that institutional cultural change is complex and takes a lot of time, and the time for patience is over. That is why we announced that we were creating a new internal organization, led by Lieutenant-General Jennie Carignan as the chief of professional conduct and culture. She will be tasked with unifying, integrating and coordinating all policies, programs and activities that currently address systemic misconduct and support cultural change across National Defence. We need to ensure that everyone who wants to come forward feels comfortable in doing so.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have been sitting here listening to this. Nothing demonstrates that the Conservatives are more tone deaf on this issue than the fact that they cannot even get the Bloc and the NDP to agree that this is a good motion.

I do not see how this motion is going to help the cause. We have serious work to do in our armed forces. Why the Conservatives did not bring forward another motion to actually help address the issue is beyond me.

Could the member comment as to whether she agrees with that?

Ms. Kamal Khera: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right. The motion does not address any of the things the Conservatives say they care about.

On the work we have been doing, we announced that Madame Arbour would conduct an independent review into the Canadian Armed Forces, including the creation of an external reporting system that would be independent from the chain of command. Those are tangible things we are doing within the Canadian Armed Forces and they are important things, as the member would agree.

I would like to thank everyone for contributing to this debate to ensure everyone feels safe to come forward, especially when it comes to any misconduct.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, women in Canada are often forced to choose between staying in a violent home or leaving and experiencing poverty and homelessness. Women who are low-income seniors living alone are often forced to choose between paying rent or paying for food and medication. Single mothers are struggling to secure adequate housing to avoid having their children taken away from them.

Women have experienced the worst impacts of the housing affordability crisis for far too long. Poor women, racialized women and women with disabilities face the greatest risks.

Last week, a 17-year-old indigenous woman who was homeless died in Nanaimo. Her name was Jada. The people who knew and loved Jada, and were trying to help her are devastated by her death.

The right to housing means every person has a right to a safe, secure home where they can live with dignity. Too many women in Canada are denied that right.

CANADA SUMMER JOBS INITIATIVE

Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that young Canadians have seen a tremendous amount of job losses due to COVID-19. One of the many ways our federal government is stepping up to support our youth is with a record-breaking 150,000 job opportunities being offered through the Canada summer jobs program. This program will not only help students gain work experience and earn money, but will also help organizations and businesses bring in fresh energy and ideas at a time when we need them as we are trying to support our local economies.

In my riding of Davenport, \$1.9 million was allocated to 113 recipient organizations and small businesses to create just under 400 jobs. This is a sixfold increase from when I was first elected five years ago.

I want to thank the organizations and businesses in Davenport for stepping up to offer excellent jobs, with a special shout-out to Roseneath Theatre, Blueberry X, Dawah Centre, West Toronto Community Legal Services, First Portuguese, Sistering, Pollinator Partnership and so many more.

I encourage all students in Davenport and across the country to visit jobbank.gc.ca to apply.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Bob Benzen (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, media revelations that the RCMP kept information from the Liberals' long-gun registry that Parliament ordered destroyed is blowing new holes in Canadians' already shaky trust in government. Now we know why the RCMP targeted certain homes for firearms collections during the High River flooding in Alberta. It is because it had a copy of the registry information. It was not supposed to have it, but it knew exactly where to look.

It is disgraceful that the government and its national institutions cannot be trusted to honour the same rules it, in turn, expects all citizens to follow. What a betrayal this is of Canadians' assumptions of equality under the law.

In light of these reports, the Prime Minister and his Minister of Public Safety need to ensure that the RCMP destroys its secret list and comes clean on just what other private information it has compiled that the law does not permit it to have.

* * *

COVID-19 VACCINES

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not so long ago, in a galaxy not so far away, a rebel alliance of scientists and researchers, including a few Jedi, I am sure, worked together to eradicate smallpox and polio. Because of their courage and that all the Padawans who did their part by getting vaccinated, a new hope emerged and these diseases are something we mostly hear about.

Unfortunately, last year, we all learned that a new virus decided to strike back and we truly saw the dark side of a global pandemic. However, as was the case before, the alliance worked hard, brought

Statements by Members

us the return of the vaccines and helped awaken us all to the fact that vaccines are safe and effective.

[Translation]

I would encourage everyone in my community of Vaudreuil—Soulanges to join me and make an appointment to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

In the meantime, let us all continue to follow the public health guidelines and, of course, the teachings of a great Jedi master, who would say, “Wear masks, we do; wash our hands, we must; get through, we will”.

[English]

May the 4th be with you, Mr. Speaker.

* * *

[Translation]

ST. LAWRENCE SEAWAY

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the St. Lawrence Seaway is an asset that runs through my riding, Salaberry—Suroît.

When boating season begins, traffic disruptions at the Larocque Bridge and Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague Bridge are part of daily life for local residents and business owners.

Motorists, cyclists and recreational boaters deserve a modernized St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation website that presents an accurate schedule of bridge lifts to help them plan their travel.

That is why I sponsored petition e-3252, which is available online until May 11, 2021. It was initiated by Daniel Pinsonneault from Coteau-du-Lac. I invite everyone to support him and the 12 municipalities that are also asking for these changes. The relationship between the St. Lawrence Seaway Management Corporation and our community is important. Through this petition, we aim to strengthen a culture of communication.

I salute the seaway managers who recently made improvements to their web platform. This is a step in the right direction, but more can be done. I urge them to do so.

* * *

● (1405)

MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I want to draw attention to Mental Health Week and this year's theme, #GetReal. In Quebec, almost 20% of the population says that they suffer from mental illness, and half of these illnesses start by 14 years of age.

In Hochelaga, several initiatives to combat isolation have been launched by community organizations and schools, and even by individuals. For example, the Centre d'entraide Le Pivotal, a citizen-led initiative, helps residents of Mercier West conquer isolation every day while fostering social reintegration.

Statements by Members

Throughout the pandemic, Hochelaga MON Quartier, a private Facebook group with more than 26,000 members, gave people a way to stay connected and help one another every day despite the lockdown.

I would like the people of Hochelaga to know that if you are aware of someone going through tough times, call them or send them a message. We must take care of one another because together, we will combat isolation and depression.

* * *

[English]

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I speak today to recognize the inspiring work of Habitat for Humanity and to congratulate Haldimand-Norfolk's newest habitat homeowners, Russ, Sharon and Krysten. Habitat for Humanity mobilizes volunteers, businesses and communities to help families in need build strength, stability and self-reliance through affordable home ownership. In our area alone, more than 25 families have new homes thanks to them.

Habitat also operates home improvement stores called Habitat ReStore, where donated surplus furnishings and building materials are sold at bargain prices. It is the ultimate in recycling. Where else could someone buy an \$850 toilet for \$52 or a wingback chair for just \$15?

My heartiest thanks go to the volunteers, donors, businesses and staff who work so hard to make the dream of affordable home ownership come true, even during a pandemic.

* * *

MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week is Mental Health Week. This year's theme is centred on getting real about how someone feels, building our own capacities and giving voice and understanding to our own mental health. The mental health of Canadians has been challenged this past year. For the many families, essential workers and health teams from coast to coast to coast, this is an important time to reflect on how we are doing and supporting our mental health and well-being.

During Mental Health Week and every week we should be able, without stigma, to name and deal with our emotions. Being able to talk about our ups and downs, as awkward as it might sometimes feel, is essential. Conversations about our mental health with friends, family and neighbours, especially during these challenging times, is something we should and must talk about.

Mental Health Week reminds us to take care of ourselves and to show up for one another, to take action and use the resource networks available to us, like wellnesstogether.ca and Kids Help Phone. Why? It is because we know that a healthy society is one that supports the mental health of all Canadians.

BILL C-10

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Toronto—Danforth, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our artists have been hit hard by the pandemic and, yet, right now we need them more than ever. It is their stories and songs that are helping us get through COVID-19. Helping artists and creators is at the heart of what Bill C-10 is about. Making sure that web giants contribute to our great creative industries for the stories, for the music and for the Canadian jobs in this important industry from coast to coast to coast. I hope that the Conservatives will end their filibuster and allow all of us to complete Bill C-10 and the urgent work required for our artists.

I was pleased to see the Canadian Independent Music Association, SOCAN, IATSE, Unifor and others show their support for us to continue through clause by clause, and to make it easier to discover Canadian shows and music, and make sure that web giants are making financial contributions to the Canadian sector. Let us get this done for our artists.

* * *

● (1410)

RCAF HERO

Mr. Rob Morrison (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, local farm kid, Clarence (C.B.) Lang took his first job at the Huscroft sawmill in Creston B.C. It was a chance flight with an RCAF WWII flight instructor Ken Huscroft, who owned the sawmill, where Lang discovered his passion for flight, joining the Royal Canadian Air Force the following year.

Clarence was chosen to fly in the difficult slot position with the famed Golden Hawks. In 1966, he was named squadron leader of the Golden Centennaires, formed to celebrate Canada's 100th birthday. They flew over 100 shows, were the only air force acrobatic unit to land and take off in formation and were considered the best in the world. In fact, the commander of the American Thunderbirds said it was the finest exhibition of precision flying ever seen.

Colonel Clarence Lang retired to Creston. Huscroft's son Johnny purchased a Golden Centennaire Tutor and is now working to pedestal the iconic plane near Creston this summer, hoping to one day to see the Snowbirds fly over.

Today I would like to acknowledge Johnny Huscroft, his team and the important work to secure the legacy of this hero, Clarence (C.B.) Lang.

POLISH AND LITHUANIAN CANADIANS

Mr. Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I had the wonderful virtual opportunity to join our Polish and Lithuanian residents in Canada to commemorate the 230th anniversary of one of the oldest constitutions in the world. For our one million plus people of Polish and Lithuanian descent living in Canada, this was an important occasion. Poland also celebrated its national day, which marks the anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of May 3, 1791.

Our Polish and Lithuanian Canadians continue to help make Canada the strong and vibrant country it is today. They have made a remarkable contribution to local businesses, services and the cultural fabric of our country. I am also truly honoured to represent one of the largest Polish communities in our nation.

This past year has been a very challenging year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our Polish and Lithuanian front-line essential workers. It is indeed a commendable brave fight against COVID-19. I am proud to convey my heartfelt, huge thanks.

INTERNATIONAL FIREFIGHTERS DAY

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is International Firefighters Day.

After the tragic deaths of five firefighters in Australia in 1998, the day is observed to remember those who died in the line of duty, while at the same time to show our support and appreciation to firefighters who work in unimaginable situations to protect our communities.

As a former firefighter, I can speak to the commitment and professionalism that every firefighter has for the communities they serve. It is a proud tradition, a calling, that is often generational, as it was in my case with my uncle, Peter Hayes, who worked 35 years with York and then Toronto fire services. This calling, however, comes with great sacrifices, occupational illness and disease, mental health issues, broken families and death related to service, to name a few, but if I ask any firefighter if they would choose another career, many would say “no”.

To my former my former IAFF colleagues in Markham, to the Barry and Innisfil firefighters and all firefighters across Canada, happy International Firefighters Day. Stay safe and stay healthy.

JOHN MCCAIN PRIZE FOR LEADERSHIP IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Halifax International Security Forum has announced the winner of the 2020 John McCain Prize for Leadership in Public Service: Tsai Ing-wen, President of Taiwan.

Despite being pressured by the government to withhold the prize, the Halifax International Security Forum decided to stand up and speak out for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. President Tsai Ing-wen has been a strong leader in standing up to the belligerence coming from the Chinese communist leadership in

Statements by Members

Beijing and speaking up about its violations of human rights and international law. She has been a tireless champion for the rules-based international order.

Once again, I congratulate President Tsai Ing-wen on receiving the John McCain Prize for Leadership in Public Service.

BIG BROTHER CANADA

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, cultural events lie at the heart of life in northwest B.C., whether it's the All-Native Basketball Tournament in Prince Rupert, or Hobiye in the Nass Valley. Having these events cancelled by the pandemic has been hard on folks, but now, people have found a reason to come together virtually, because Kiefer Collison, the voice of CFNR and the All-Native Basketball Tournament, has made it to the final week of the reality show, *Big Brother Canada*.

He is a proud Haida, born and raised in Old Masset. Kiefer's huge smile, signature mullet and generosity of spirit reflect the best of the northwest. His time on *Big Brother Canada* is teaching Canada who indigenous people truly are, erasing stereotypes and bringing people together. Here at home, store windows are decorated and people of all ages are wearing “Kief It Real” T-shirts to cheer him on.

The pandemic has been overwhelming and stressful for many, so when there are small things that bring joy, it is worth embracing them. Best of luck to Kiefer, and, as Kiefer says, “Love, peace and oolichan grease”.

● (1415)

[Translation]

CAFÉ PARENTHÈSE

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during this National Mental Health Week it is important to remember that the vulnerable are being hit hard by the pandemic.

We were therefore very pleased to welcome a new project in Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, the Parenthèse café. The project seeks to provide an open, welcoming and safe community where people coping with social disorganization or emotional stress can benefit from counselling services and feel less isolated.

The project provides an accessible place to take a break free from judgment, where isolated individuals can move at their own pace. We need initiatives like Parenthèse café more than ever to help marginalized people regain their quality of life.

Oral Questions

I want to send out a special thanks to the two organizations behind this project, Atelier ensemble on se tient and Écluse des Laurentides. I would also like to acknowledge Priscillia Laplante in particular.

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[English]

BILL C-10

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a democracy, it is the government's job to defend people's right to speak freely, yet the Liberal government is doing the exact opposite. The Liberals changed their own legislation in Bill C-10 by removing the one section that protected the content Canadians post on their social media pages. The question I ask is, why?

For Bill C-10 to become law, it first has to pass a sniff test to make sure that it abides by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In November, the justice minister gave Bill C-10 the green light, citing clause 3, which protected individuals' online content from censorship. Interestingly enough, however, that is the very section that was removed.

Last week at committee, I put forward a motion that would seek to ensure Canadians' rights are protected. The Liberals shut down debate. Indeed, freedom is messy, but the alternative is soul-crushing and altogether destructive. Respect for the charter should not be a partisan issue, however, it is increasingly so. Conservatives will always defend the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I would invite the Liberal members to do the same.

* * *

[Translation]

JEAN-CLAUDE CHARTRAND

Mr. William Amos (Pontiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, chef Jean-Claude Chartrand, owner of the L'Orée du Bois restaurant in Chelsea and ambassador for the Outaouais, passed away recently.

I want to express my condolences to his wife, Josée, and their children, whom I spoke to this morning. We will never forget chef Jean-Claude, as we knew him, or the true sense of hospitality and joy he put into his creative dishes.

The general public got to experience his sense of humour and love of local Outaouais products for themselves, after he appeared on a Radio-Canada TV show called *Le Combat des villes* in 2016 and made it to the finals.

Chef Jean-Claude gave many Quebeckers, including me, a taste for cooking. From him, I learned how important it is to support small, local farmers.

I had the privilege and great honour of serving as his sous-chef at the Outaouais' Gourmet Festival.

On behalf of the people of Pontiac and myself, I offer my sincere condolences to the loved ones of chef Jean-Claude Chartrand.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

HEALTH

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, vaccination, rapid testing and accurate information are three tools to fight this pandemic. For months, we have been telling Canadians to get vaccinated.

The Canadian Pharmacists Association is worried that the government's inaccurate messaging will stoke vaccine hesitancy. Why are we getting a different message every week from the government?

● (1420)

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we always rely on the science, which is of course evolving all the time. We will always stress that people should get vaccinated as quickly as possible. Health Canada has approved all the vaccines we use in Canada and has deemed them to be safe and effective.

I continue to encourage everyone to get vaccinated because it is only by vaccinating the entire population, or as much of it as possible, that we can leave the COVID-19 pandemic behind us.

[English]

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there are three tools we need to fight a pandemic: vaccines, rapid tests and information. The government has been failing on all three, and the Prime Minister is causing confusion again this week.

For months, Canadians have been told to get the first vaccine available to them. Today, the Prime Minister refused to confirm that advice on 10 different occasions. Canadians deserve clarity from the government. Is there a preferred type of vaccine?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is extremely important that Canadians get the facts. That is why we continue to update them on scientific recommendations and the recommendations of doctors. However, the reality is, and I will say it again, as I have said it many times this morning and as I have been saying for months, that the most important thing is for Canadians to get vaccinated with the first vaccine offered to them. That is how we will get through this.

Every vaccine for use in Canada has been judged safe and effective by Health Canada. We all need to get vaccinated to get through this pandemic.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the Mark Norman trial, we learned that General Vance was so close to the Prime Minister's Office that he went to dinner with senior staff, including Katie Telford. Mark Norman could not have been charged without the testimony of General Vance.

Did Katie Telford sit on the General Vance allegation to further the Norman prosecution?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is interesting because in January 2019, when this Prime Minister was asked questions about the Norman trial, he said he was in regular contact with General Vance. That was a year after the Prime Minister's chief of staff was made aware of sexual misconduct allegations against the general, and that was four months before this Prime Minister gave the general a \$50,000 raise.

Did the Prime Minister himself know about the allegations against General Vance, or is he satisfied with the cover-up conducted by his chief of staff?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, as a government, we have always taken extremely seriously our responsibility to ensure that survivors who come forward with allegations or experiences of sexual harassment or sexual assault get properly supported. We have seen, time and time again, over many years, that the processes in place have not been strong enough to support them.

We have made significant investments and improvements in those processes, but there is more to do. That is what we are focused on as a government. By appointing Justice Arbour and Lieutenant-General Carignan, we will continue to make sure we are supporting anyone who comes forward with allegations.

Hon. Erin O'Toole (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a survivor did come forward three years ago, but it seemed to interfere with the Mark Norman prosecution. The testimony of General Vance was critical to the Norman prosecution, and PCO lawyers, the department that is the Prime Minister's department, were found in documents to have said they needed to “engineer the issues at stake” in the Norman trial. Who was doing the engineering? It was the Privy Council Office and Ms. Telford, the chief of staff to the Prime Minister.

Therefore, I will ask him again: Did his chief of staff sit on allegations against the former chief of the defence staff to further the Norman prosecution?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing to watch the leader of the official opposition twist himself in knots to try to perpetrate some sort of conspiracy theory.

The reality is that every step of the way we have moved forward on strengthening supports for survivors of sexual assault and made sure we are strengthening processes. There is more to do, but as a government and as an office, we have always taken that seriously. Every woman and man who serves in the armed forces, or works in any workplace in Canada, deserves to be supported if they come forward with concerns and allegations.

Oral Questions

• (1425)

[Translation]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, nearly one million people across Canada are reported to have been the victims of identity theft.

One million people will be expected to pay taxes on amounts that they never received. They are victims of fraud. The government told them to pay their taxes and then it will see. We do not know how much money that represents either overall, by province or for Quebec.

How can the Prime Minister justify making victims of fraud pay taxes for the fraudster rather than giving them government support?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is completely false.

With CERB, the priority has always been to quickly help Canadians when they needed it. That is exactly what we did with CERB.

We know that some Canadians have been the victims of fraud. The departments are working closely with the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre to resolve those problems. We will continue to work together.

I want to point out that victims of fraud will not be held responsible for the amounts paid to people who stole their identity. We are there to support Canadians in these difficult times.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister just said the exact opposite of what he is doing.

He said victims will not be held responsible for the money paid to fraudsters, but these people are being told to pay tax on the money paid to fraudsters. That is the exact opposite of what the Prime Minister just said.

We also suggested doing like Quebec and giving people a month to figure things out, giving public servants a month they will surely need. Proportionally speaking, we should probably give the minister at least six months to get a handle on her file.

Will the Prime Minister pledge not to tax income people did not receive?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the departments are working very closely with the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre to resolve these problems.

We will always be there to support victims of fraud in this country. We have also made sure that ESDC and the CRA have the resources they need to enhance their ability to detect, investigate and deal with fraud.

We will be there to help Canadians who have been victims of fraud.

*Oral Questions***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the situation with respect to sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces was exactly the same in 2015.

Justice Deschamps produced a report that raises concerns. She sent a clear message that simply repeating the mantra of zero tolerance without taking action to protect women was not good enough.

What did the Liberal government do?

It continued repeating the mantra without taking any concrete action to protect women in the Canadian Forces.

Why does the Prime Minister refuse to implement the recommendations of the Deschamps report?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since 2015, we have taken concrete action both in the military and in our government to support survivors of sexual violence.

We have listened to survivors. We have strengthened our laws against domestic violence. We have made investments to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. In June 2017, we announced the first-ever federal strategy to prevent gender-based violence, along with a \$200-million investment. We established a national action plan that was announced in January 2021.

We will continue to work to support everyone from coast to coast to coast.

[English]

Mr. Jagmeet Singh (Burnaby South, NDP): Mr. Speaker, right now there is a chilling message being sent to women in the Canadian Armed Forces. It is that, if they raise a complaint and it makes it to the highest office of this land, they will be ignored and nothing will be done. Instead of fixing it, the Liberal government wants to put in place another inquiry, despite ignoring the inquiry from 2015 and not putting in place any of those recommendations. The Conservatives want to get into a fight about who is worse.

I will help everyone out. Both the Conservatives and the Liberals have failed to protect women in the Canadian Armed Forces.

What will the Prime Minister concretely do to protect women in the Canadian Armed Forces?

Right Hon. Justin Trudeau (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, in addition to appointing Justice Arbour to move forward on lasting reforms, we appointed Lieutenant-General Jennie Carignan to head a unit specifically dedicated to hearing, receiving and supporting anyone who comes forward with allegations of unacceptable conduct, harassment or assault.

We have continued, over the past many years, to make investments in fighting gender-based violence, pushing back against misogyny, fighting domestic violence and being there to support survivors. We will continue to do that. There is much more work to do.

• (1430)

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's chief of staff is supposed to be the

Prime Minister's right hand, the person who works behind the scenes to make everything run smoothly. She is the one taking the helm in a storm. That person works closely with the Prime Minister.

The ombudsman confirmed that the chief of staff, Ms. Telford, was aware of the allegations against Mr. Vance.

Either the Prime Minister knew that or there is no communication at that office.

Which is it?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadian Armed Forces members make enormous sacrifices to protect Canadians, regardless of rank or gender, and they have an undeniable right to serve with safety. It is clear that we have not lived up to our responsibilities to protect members from misconduct. We are going to do better.

That is why we announced that Louise Arbour will lead an independent external comprehensive review. Plus, we have also named Lieutenant-General Jennie Carignan as chief of professional conduct and culture. These are the initial steps, and we will do more.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Armed Forces are a world leader in terms of the proportion of women in service. The Liberal Party claims to be the party of feminism and diversity, but it continues to sweep scandals under the rug to protect its old boys' club.

The Minister of National Defence failed to protect our women in service. There is a code of silence in this government. No one talks to each other.

How long is the Prime Minister going to keep trying to make us believe that he was not aware?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear. When Mr. Walbourne brought up those concerns of misconduct involving the former chief of the defence, he did not provide details.

Who had the details? The Leader of the Opposition did. He heard rumours back in 2015 regarding General Vance, and he felt they were so serious that he brought it to the former prime minister's chief of staff at that time. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition would like to provide greater details about what he knew in 2015 and why they still appointed General Vance.

Oral Questions

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister had actual evidence, not just rumours, and did nothing with it. The defence minister was personally briefed by the former military ombudsman about sexual misconduct allegations against General Vance, but the defence minister refuses to say he knew it was sexual misconduct.

Senior advisor to the Prime Minister Elder Marques knew it was sexual harassment, and so did the Prime Minister's Privy Council Office. They released briefing notes and emails that proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was referred to as sexual harassment.

How does the defence minister expect us to believe that he never told the Prime Minister that his top soldier stood accused of sexual misconduct?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to make this very clear. As I said at committee, I did not know the nature, the specifics or the details. The former ombudsman brought up concerns of misconduct involving the former chief of the defence staff, but did not provide any details.

Who had the details? The Leader of the Opposition had them. Let us not forget, the member opposite was the parliamentary secretary of national defence at that time, while there was an investigation going on into General Vance. They still appointed him.

Maybe the member opposite would like to provide further details of what he knew when he was in that position and the appointment was made, while an investigation was ongoing at that time.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe that defence minister would like to be the architect of some better talking points.

Former ombudsman Gary Walbourne testified at the defence committee that he told this minister, face to face, that the allegations against General Vance were of inappropriate sexual behaviour, but the minister keeps denying this. Gary Walbourne just said on Twitter that he is willing to take a lie detector test to prove that he is telling the truth.

Will the defence minister accept the challenge and take one too, right beside Gary Walbourne, so we could know, once and for all, who is telling the truth?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have repeated the answer many times. As I stated, he did not provide any details or specifics of the case. One thing we have done is make sure we take action to provide support to women. We know that more work needs to be done.

While the official opposition and the member opposite play politics, we will stay focused on the work at hand to make sure that we create a harassment-free workplace, something that we are committed to doing.

Maybe the member opposite would like to explain what he knew at that time, when he was a parliamentary secretary and there was a formal investigation going on, and still made the appointment of General Vance as chief of the defence staff.

• (1435)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, the Minister of Defence said that the nature of the complaint "does not matter". When the general is in charge of Operation Honour, it matters. When he appoints a head of HR with so many sexual misconduct allegations against him that he is known as the "Mulligan Man", it matters. When someone is a woman serving her country, it matters.

Could the man, who is the Minister of National Defence, tell me why he thinks it does not?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to make it very clear that the quote was taken out of context. What I stated was that we followed all the processes when the information was provided, but when it came to a chief of the defence staff, any type of misconduct brought forward had to be taken seriously, and that is exactly what we did.

We know we have more work to do, and that is exactly what we will be doing, to make sure we create a harassment-free workplace inside the Canadian Armed Forces.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has nowhere to shift the blame on this total failure. He continues to claim he knew nothing of the allegations, but his defence minister knew, the defence ombudsman knew, his chief of staff knew, Elder Marques knew and the former chief of the Privy Council knew.

How can the Prime Minister claim all these people knew the details of the allegation but he was left in the dark?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has absolutely no tolerance for misconduct. We followed the process, the same one the previous government followed.

The current leader of the official opposition was made aware of misconduct rumours back in 2015. It was serious enough that he asked his staff to notify the prime minister's chief of staff, who then took it to the Privy Council Office for a review. In other words, the same steps were followed.

How can the leader of the official opposition seriously have his party stand here and decry the same process?

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in 2018, the national defence ombudsman gave the Minister of National Defence a file containing allegations of sexual misconduct against the chief of the defence staff.

Oral Questions

What did the minister do? First, he refused to listen to the ombudsman and said that he did not want to get involved. Second, he told us that he did not tell anyone, meaning that he hid these allegations. Third, he increased the general's maximum yearly salary by \$50,000. Fourth, when the allegations were substantiated, he claimed that no one had tried to inform him.

Does this minister have any credibility left?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I completely disagree with the assertion the member opposition is making. When information was provided, as I stated, no details were provided at the time. Nonetheless, we gave direction to the ombudsman, which was followed up the very next day. The process was followed. Now, it did not provide justice for the survivors, but in this case here, no politician should ever get involved in any type of investigation. We have more work to do, but we will get it done.

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that was fairly convoluted. In response to the scandal, the Minister of National Defence mandated former justice Louise Arbour to investigate. He essentially told her to look at the recommendations from another investigation by former justice Marie Deschamps, whose report was presented and shelved six years ago.

The Minister of National Defence is asking for recommendations about other recommendations that have been shelved for six years and have suddenly become important now that issues have come up. How can the victims truly have confidence in the Minister of National Defence when he is the one responsible for implementing the recommendations?

[English]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know we have a lot more work to do to make sure we create an inclusive environment for all in the Canadian Armed Forces. The work that was done with the sexual misconduct response centre obviously has not gone far enough. We want to go further; we need to be more bold. That is exactly what we will be doing with the work Madame Arbour will be doing and the work Lieutenant-General Carignan will be taking on.

* * *

● (1440)

HEALTH

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at a press conference today, the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada said that further advice would be forthcoming regarding second doses for people who had received one dose of AstraZeneca.

Will this new advice mean that Canadians who have received one dose of AstraZeneca may have to obtain one or more doses of Pfizer or Moderna to achieve full immunity?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite has a hard time understanding this, but this is a brand new pandemic, a brand new virus, and certainly the

science continues to evolve and provide us advice and evidence on how best to protect Canadians.

It is important that Canadians accept the first vaccination that is offered to them. All vaccines that are in use in Canada are approved as safe and effective. We can be part of the solution. We can protect lives and we can stop the spread.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the minister patronizes me, she patronizes every Canadian who has the same question.

The concept of vaccine mixing will be confusing to some Canadians, and the chief public health officer opened this front this morning.

Therefore, I will ask her again. For Canadians who have already received one dose of AstraZeneca, should they wait for another dose of AstraZeneca no matter what the time delay or does the health minister expect Canadians might be told they can or should have one or more doses of Pfizer or Moderna to achieve full immunity?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I will reiterate for Canadians that all vaccines that are approved for use in Canada are safe and effective. In fact, I was so excited to receive my first dose of AstraZeneca just over a week ago. I certainly encourage my friends, my family and all the people in my community to accept the first vaccination that is offered.

We know that vaccines save lives, and they also contribute to stopping the spread. We can see the finish line. We can see the finish line here and across the world. Vaccination is important, and we will continue to provide Canadians with the best science as it evolves.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the vaccine rollout in Canada is a perfect example of the Prime Minister's lack of leadership. He boasted about having the best portfolio of vaccines in the world, but that was never true.

Yesterday, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization confirmed that Canadians should wait for one of the two preferred vaccines, if they can. Canadians are hearing two messages: get vaccinated and wait to get vaccinated.

In the meantime, the Prime Minister is dragging his feet. When will he demonstrate the leadership expected of him and tell Canadians the truth?

[English]

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has been very clear. All vaccines approved for use in Canada are safe and effective, both for stopping the spread of COVID and for saving lives.

It is very unfortunate to hear the member opposite try to incite fear in Canadians. I would encourage Canadians who have questions about vaccinations to speak to their health care professionals, to speak to the pharmacists, to speak to the vaccinators across the country who are taking such great care and working so quickly. In fact, 14 million Canadians have received their first dose.

Vaccination is our path forward, and I am so thrilled and honoured to be vaccinated myself.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the minister that I am not inciting fear in Canadians. We are listening to the experts, whose advice is different from the minister's.

I have another question. Millions of masks ordered by Ottawa for the pandemic were not delivered because they were defective. However, a payment of \$80 million was made to the Montreal company Tango Communication Marketing for this order.

Now taxpayers are on the hook for the \$80-million cost of these masks that do not meet Canadian standards. The Prime Minister may believe that money grows on trees, but it does not. Can the minister tell us when she will recover the \$80 million?

[English]

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with the taxpayers in mind that we have terminated the contract that was referenced in the question and that we will be seeking legal remedies as a result.

We stand up for Canadian taxpayers, and we will not pay for defective masks. That is the purpose of our terminating the contract and seeking additional remedies.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Liberals gave in to a web giant, and once again, it is Netflix. In reading the budget, we discovered that Netflix will not have to pay the so-called digital services tax of 3%. We thought it was a mistake or another blunder, so we asked the finance minister about it and, no, the Liberals did it on purpose. It was deliberate.

In 2020, Netflix generated \$25 billion in revenue, but this company does not pay any tax at all in Canada. The Liberals think that is fine the way it is. Will the minister reverse that decision and have the courage to do the right thing? It is not complicated.

[English]

“Do. Or do not. There is no try.”

• (1445)

[Translation]

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Oral Questions

I want to point out that there is no specific exception for Netflix or any other digital company. In fact, on July 1, we will start charging GST and HST to digital service providers like Netflix for the first time in Canadian history. That provision is included in budget implementation act, 2021, no. 1 and should bring in \$1.2 billion over five years.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, millions of Canadians lost their jobs during the pandemic and with it their dental benefits. Millions more never had them to begin with. People end up in emergency rooms with pain and serious complications that could be prevented with basic dental care.

Today, the House debates my plan to create a dental care program for those with family incomes of less than \$90,000. Nearly seven million people would benefit, including half of those over age 60, over 30% of young adults and half the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Will the minister support providing dental care to those who need it most?

Hon. Patty Hajdu (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree that dental care needs to be equitably accessible to Canadians across the country. I look forward to talking to provinces and territories about how we collaboratively strengthen our health care system.

As the member opposite knows, I encourage HESA, if it finds it a topic of interest, to study the issue of dental care and how Canadians could access better dental care all across the country.

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SENIORS

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of the Liberal government that recognizes the valuable contributions that seniors have made to Canada and continue to make in our communities, like my riding of Alfred-Pellan. It is essential that we support the health and security of seniors, particularly at this critical moment in the pandemic when we need to defeat COVID-19.

Could the Minister of Seniors update the House of our commitments in budget 2021 to protect and support seniors?

Hon. Deb Schulte (Minister of Seniors, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his leadership with the Liberal seniors caucus.

Oral Questions

Budget 2021 recognizes seniors' increased needs as they age. In August, we are issuing to seniors who are 75 and older as of June 2022 a one-time \$500 payment and we are delivering on our commitment to increase old age security by 10% for those age 75-plus in July of 2022. We are also investing \$3 billion in long-term care and \$90 million over three years to launch our age well at home initiative.

Our government will always be there to support seniors.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 10 times the heritage minister has decried fake news when questioned about Bill C-10. Those who have criticized the Liberals' attempt to violate Canadians' freedom of expression have been called extremists. Yesterday, the minister resorted to a new low by attacking my personal beliefs and values because he did not like that I was asking important questions that Canadians have.

Is the government only interested in protecting the speech it agrees with?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our artists are among the Canadians who have been hit the hardest by the pandemic. They are suffering financially and mentally. Bill C-10 brought them the hope that things would get better soon, with the promise of forcing web giants to invest in our stories and music.

Now the Conservatives are stalling Bill C-10, siding with web giants against Canadian artists who are deprived of hundreds of millions of dollars. Why is the Conservative Party siding with Google, one of the wealthiest companies in the world, instead of Canadian musicians and artists?

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that was a non-answer. For Bills like C-10 to become law, they have to pass a sniff test to make sure they adhere to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

In November, the justice minister gave Bill C-10 a green light, but the bill has changed significantly since that time. Experts believe that a new opinion is needed from the justice minister. Over and over again, the heritage minister, including just right now, has proven incompetent in his ability to answer my question.

Therefore, my question is for the justice minister. Does he agree that a new charter statement is needed?

● (1450)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the bill is not about what Canadians do online. It is about what the web giants do not do, which is to support Canadian stories and music. The bill explicitly exempts individuals from contribution requirements. We have and will continue to improve the bill so it can serve Canadian creators.

Again, the real issue is why the Conservative Party is taking sides with some of the wealthiest companies in the world like Google and YouTube instead of supporting Canadian artists.

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for a week now, we have been asking the Minister of Canadian Heritage to tell us why he is not listening to experts who say Bill C-10 is a direct attack on freedom of expression. He has denied the facts and turned down our request to get another opinion from the Minister of Justice.

Given that he has failed to step up, I will put my question to the Minister of Justice directly. Will he provide an opinion on whether this bill complies with section 2(b) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms or not?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as they say, actions speak louder than words.

My esteemed colleague has an opportunity to support francophone artists from across the country. Bill C-10 will enable the government to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in culture, in music, in our TV shows and movies and in francophone culture across the country.

If he is really such a champion of francophone culture, why is he standing in the way of Bill C-10? ADISQ, SARTEC and Quebec's Union des Artistes are calling on the Conservative Party to support Bill C-10.

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am amazed to learn that we have a new justice minister.

Peter Menzies, a former CRTC commissioner, has said that this is a full-blown assault on freedom of expression and the foundations of democracy.

It is hard to grasp the level of hubris or incompetence that would lead someone to believe that such an infringement on people's rights is justifiable.

I repeat my question, which is for the Minister of Justice. Will he issue a new opinion to ensure that the bill complies with section 2(b) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, yes or no?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Google made \$180 billion U.S. in profits last year, and YouTube made \$15.1 billion U.S.

All Bill C-10 asks is that a small portion be invested in Canadian and Quebec culture, for our artists and creators. The Conservatives insist on protecting these companies, which are among the richest and whose profits have increased scandalously during the pandemic. It is incomprehensible.

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for years, the cultural sector and the Bloc Québécois have been demanding that digital giants be taxed on revenues they earn in Quebec and in Canada. We call it the Netflix tax. Can anyone imagine the Netflix tax existing, but not applying to Netflix? I could not make this up.

Web giants that make their profits from subscriptions will not have to pay a cent in taxes. Quebec businesses will continue to pay their share, while foreign businesses will continue not to pay theirs.

Why does the government keep giving multinational web giants a free ride?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the hon. member, I must say that what he is saying is false.

Let us not forget that a year ago, there was no obligation on the part of web giants to invest in Quebec culture. That is what we are trying to accomplish with Bill C-10. There was no taxation for web giants, but it is included in the last budget. We have also announced, as have many other countries, that we would move forward with further measures. I challenge members to find any other country that is doing as much as Canada is doing right now to take on web giants. There is no such country. That is the simple and fundamental truth.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to correct my colleague. Netflix is not subject to the digital services tax. He should take a look at page 700 of the budget presented by his colleague, the Minister of Finance.

The Liberals always do things halfway if they do anything at all. The Bloc Québécois suggested that the money collected from taxing the web giants be put into a fund for the culture and media sectors. These sectors have been hardest hit by unfair competition from multinationals.

The government refuses to create such a fund. Worse yet, web giants like Netflix, Amazon Prime, Spotify and YouTube Premium are exempt from paying tax on revenue earned in Quebec, even on revenue earned from Quebec content. The whole idea behind the bill is to put an end to this injustice.

Why is Ottawa once again abandoning our creators?

• (1455)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if anyone is abandoning our creators, it is the opposition. It refuses to let us move forward with Bill C-10, which nearly all arts organizations across the country are calling for. Just this week, it was ADISQ and the Union des artistes.

Why did the Bloc Québécois vote in favour of a Conservative Party resolution to halt work on Bill C-10, through which hundreds of millions of dollars will be invested in Quebec culture and francophone Canadian culture across the country? It makes no sense.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Justice Deschamps said at FEWO:

In order to bring about cultural change in an organization, and to reduce the occurrence of sexual harassment and sexual assault, it is essential that senior leaders, and particularly those with general oversight responsibilities, become directly engaged in cultural reform.

Instead, what we have seen is the minister and the Prime Minister consistently refusing to take responsibility.

When will the Minister of National Defence stop avoiding his responsibilities and bring about true cultural change?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is something that we are absolutely committed to. Regarding the work that we have done with the Sexual Misconduct Response Centre, we need to go further than that.

As I stated before, this is one of the reasons why we have appointed Lieutenant-General Jennie Carignan as the Chief, Professional Conduct and Culture. She will be tasked with unifying, integrating and coordinating all policies, programs and activities that currently address systemic misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces. We need to do more, we will do more and we will get it done.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Justice Deschamps's 2015 report, she recommended a fully independent reporting system outside the chain of command and the Liberals did not implement it. They had five years.

How many more reports do the Minister of National Defence and the Liberals need before they do the right thing and create an independent reporting structure, and how many more victims of sexual misconduct will there be while the Liberal government, or yet another justice, issues yet another report that will take a year to complete, let alone implement?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, regarding the work that was done on implementing the recommendations by Madam Deschamps, the SMRC was the place for independent reporting to occur. What we want to do is go even further with Madam Arbour's recommendations. We want to go even bolder so that we can actually create an independent structure that cannot be changed and put greater trust into that system.

In the meantime, the work that Lieutenant-General Jennie Carignan will be doing is unifying that work so we can provide immediate support as well. We will be taking bold action and we will get this done.

Oral Questions

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know the definition of insanity. The Prime Minister keeps on doing the same thing and expecting different results. Appointing another Supreme Court justice to write another report means he will get the same results. Victims of sexual misconduct need results, not more reports.

Why will the Prime Minister not admit the only woman he is interested in protecting is Katie Telford?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely committed to making sure that we have a harassment-free workplace in the Canadian Armed Forces. There is a lot more work that needs to be done. The work that Madam Arbour will be doing is recommending possible organizational changes that can actually create independence. The work that Lieutenant-General Jennie Carignan will be doing is taking all the programs that we have to be able to work faster.

We do have more work to do and we will get it done.

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[Translation]

HOUSING

Mr. Yvan Baker (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that Canadians deserve safe and affordable housing. It is especially important to help young Canadians looking to buy their first home.

Can the the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development tell the House about the first-time home buyer incentive and how it can help young Canadians as they take this important first step?

• (1500)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

We know that it is very important to help Canadians looking to buy their first home. That is why we announced that we are expanding the first-time home buyer incentive by enhancing eligibility for applicants in Toronto, Vancouver and Victoria. We are doing that by increasing the qualifying income threshold. We are supporting a greater number of Canadians by helping them find safe and affordable housing.

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[English]

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, dozens of constituents have written to me to express their shock and dismay at the government's attempt to control speech and online content with Bill C-10. Government censorship of the Internet is something that happens in totalitarian societies, not free ones.

Since Canada already has laws that cover hate speech, what is the hidden agenda of the Minister of Canadian Heritage that requires these additional censorship powers?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this issue has nothing to do with free speech. This has nothing to do with what Canadians do online. This has everything to do with what web giants are not doing, which is investing in Canadian artists, Canadian musicians and Canadian culture.

Why is the Conservative Party protecting the interests of some of the wealthiest companies in the world instead of protecting the interests of Canadian artists and musicians?

Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my office has been inundated with calls and emails from constituents who are furious about Bill C-10, and for good reason. By rejecting an exemption that would have protected them and their social media posts from the long arm of the CRTC, the government is taking away their charter rights of freedom of speech and expression. I know the Prime Minister admires basic dictatorships, but my constituents do not.

Why is the government feeling so threatened by Canadians' right to free speech?

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our artists are among the Canadians who have been hit the hardest by the pandemic. They are suffering financially and mentally. Bill C-10 brought them the hope that things would get better soon with the promise of forcing web giants to invest in our stories and music. The Conservatives are stalling Bill C-10, siding with web giants against Canadian artists and creators who are deprived of hundreds of millions of dollars.

Why is the Conservative Party siding with Google, one of the wealthiest companies in the world, instead of with Canadian musicians and artists?

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INNOVATION, SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it makes no sense. Desperately needed deliveries of vaccines are being delayed, but the Liberals are pushing away a Canadian solution. Providence Therapeutics in Calgary is leaving Canada because the Liberals refuse to support a Canadian vaccine. The CEO of Providence said, "I gave the Canadian government the ball on the goal line. They just needed to punch it in, but they picked it up and ran in the other direction."

Is the Prime Minister really willing to fumble away a made-in-Canada vaccine simply because it is based in Alberta?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would say to my colleague that this is highly offensive. Since the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have focused on investing in made-in-Canada vaccine candidates across the nation and on increasing our domestic biomanufacturing capacity. Like Providence Therapeutics, every company that came forward was reviewed by the COVID-19 task force, which is made up of leading scientific and industry experts. In fact, we have invested nearly \$10 million in Providence Therapeutics projects and I will continue to engage with the CEO, as I have done in the past.

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PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the Conservatives chose to spend their opposition day debating vaccine and timeline facts. Let us be clear: We are all focused on ensuring everyone has access to a vaccine as quickly as possible and we have seen that. Rather than presenting us with an honest debate, members opposite proposed magical timelines showing yet again how out of touch with reality they are.

Can the minister provide Canadians with vaccine facts they can trust for today and going forward?

● (1505)

Hon. Anita Anand (Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her excellent work. This week, we are receiving two million doses of Pfizer and one million doses of Moderna. That is three million doses. In the month of May, we will receive two million doses per week of Pfizer, and up to 2.4 million doses per week during the month of June. This totals 48 million doses, at a minimum, cumulative over all doses, by the end of June. Those are the facts, and we will report and stick to the facts.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, women in Canada's armed forces are asking for real action to address the toxic culture that has existed within the armed forces for years. Instead, Liberals and Conservatives are busy playing the blame game. Here is a news flash: They are both to blame. It is the Prime Minister's responsibility to restore women's broken trust and ensure that reports of sexual misconduct will be taken seriously.

Will the Prime Minister end his platitudes, stop dragging his feet and take responsibility for his failure to act? Will he implement the recommendations of the Deschamps report now?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadian Armed Forces members make enormous sacrifices to protect Canadians, regardless of rank or gender, and have an undeniable right to serve with safety. It is clear that we have not lived up to our responsibility to protect members from misconduct, and that is why we have announced that Madame Louise Arbour will lead an independent external comprehensive review into harassment and sexual misconduct to make even bolder recommendations and changes to the Canadian Armed Forces. We

Government Orders

have also named Lieutenant-General Jennie Carignan chief of professional conduct and culture. These are just some of the initial steps. We have more to do.

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IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, my office has received many complaints from constituents who have been waiting since 2018 to take their oath of citizenship. There is also a delay of over six months in processing work permits, putting people's lives in limbo. Overseas sponsorship applications from many countries are delayed by five years. Medicals and criminality checks have expired, and citizens are getting frustrated.

Could the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship please advise what is being done to reduce this unfair processing backlog?

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has an exceptional track record when it comes to meeting our immigration objectives. In the last several months alone, we have welcomed over 80,000, prioritized over 55,000 [Technical difficulty—Editor] sponsorship applications, and welcomed over 50,000 new individuals to the family of Canadian citizenship. We are not going to stop there. We are going to do these things because we know that immigration is one of the keys to our economic recovery and Canada's long-term prosperity.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

CANADIAN NET-ZERO EMISSIONS ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed from May 3, consideration of the motion that Bill C-12, An Act respecting transparency and accountability in Canada's efforts to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2050, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: It being 3:10 p.m., pursuant to the order made on Monday, January 25, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the amendment to the motion at second reading of Bill C-12.

Call in the members.

Before the Clerk announced the results of the vote:

● (1525)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had technical difficulties and I would like my vote to be recorded as yea.

The Speaker: According to the application, it was recorded as yea and then changed to nay. In order to change it right now, we will need the unanimous consent of the House to allow that to happen.

Government Orders

Do we have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 105*)

YEAS**Members**

Aboultaif	Aitchison
Albas	Alleslev
Allison	Arnold
Baldinelli	Barlow
Barrett	Benzen
Bergen	Berthold
Bezan	Block
Bragdon	Brassard
Calkins	Carrie
Chiu	Chong
Cooper	Cumming
Dalton	Dancho
Davidson	Deltell
d'Entremont	Diotte
Doherty	Dowdall
Dreeschen	Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)
Epp	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)
Falk (Provencher)	Fast
Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Gallant	Généreux
Genuis	Gladu
Godin	Gourde
Gray	Hallan
Harder	Hoback
Jansen	Jeneroux
Kelly	Kent
Kitchen	Kmiec
Kram	Kurek
Kusie	Lake
Lawrence	Lehoux
Lewis (Essex)	Liepert
Lloyd	Lobb
Lukiwski	MacKenzie
Maguire	Martel
Martinez Ferrada	Mazier
McCauley (Edmonton West)	McColeman
McLean	McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)
Melillo	Moore
Morantz	Morrison
Motz	Nater
O'Toole	Patzer
Paul-Hus	Poilievre
Rayes	Redekopp
Reid	Rempel Garner
Richards	Rood
Ruff	Sahota (Calgary Skyview)
Saroya	Scheer
Schmale	Seeback
Shields	Shin
Shipley	Soroka
Stanton	Steinley
Strahl	Stubbs
Sweet	Tochor
Uppal	Van Popta
Vecchio	Vidal
Viersen	Vis
Wagantall	Warkentin
Wagh	Webber
Williamson	Wong
Yurdiga	Zimmer— 120

NAYS**Members**

Alghabra	Amos
Anand	Anandasangaree
Angus	Arseneault
Arya	Ashton
Atwin	Bachrach
Badawey	Bagnell
Bains	Baker
Barsalou-Duval	Battiste
Beaulieu	Beech
Bendayan	Bennett
Bergeron	Bérubé
Bessette	Bibeau
Bittle	Blaikie
Blair	Blanchet
Blanchette-Joncas	Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
Blois	Boudrias
Boulerice	Bratina
Brière	Brunelle-Duceppe
Cannings	Carr
Casey	Chabot
Chagger	Champagne
Champoux	Charbonneau
Chen	Collins
Cormier	Dabrusin
Damoff	Davies
DeBellefeuille	Desbiens
Desilets	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Dong
Drouin	Dubourg
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duvall
Dzerowicz	Easter
Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Ellis	Erskine-Smith
Fergus	Fillmore
Finnigan	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser	Freeland
Fry	Garrison
Gaudreau	Gazan
Gerretsen	Gill
Gould	Green
Guilbeault	Hajdu
Hardie	Harris
Holland	Housefather
Hughes	Hussen
Hutchings	Iacono
Ien	Jaczek
Johns	Joly
Jones	Jordan
Jowhari	Julian
Kelloway	Khalid
Khera	Koutrakis
Kusmierczyk	Kwan
Lalonde	Lambropoulos
Lametti	Lamoureux
Larouche	Lattanzio
Lauson	LeBlanc
Lebouthillier	Lefebvre
Lemire	Lightbound
Long	Longfield
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	MacAulay (Cardigan)
MacGregor	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Maloney	Manly
Marcil	Masse
Mathysen	May (Cambridge)
May (Saanic—Gulf Islands)	McCrimmon
McDonald	McGuinty
McKay	McKenna

Government Orders

McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
 McPherson
 Mendicino
 Miller
 Morrissey
 Ng
 O'Connell
 O'Regan
 Perron
 Plamondon
 Qualtrough
 Regan
 Rodriguez
 Romanado
 Saini
 Saks
 Sangha
 Savard-Tremblay
 Schiefke
 Serré
 Shanahan
 Sidhu (Brampton East)
 Simard
 Singh
 Spengemann
 Tabbara
 Thériault
 Trudeau
 Turnbull
 van Koeverden
 Vandenbeld
 Vignola
 Weiler
 Wilson-Raybould
 Young
 Zann

McLeod (Northwest Territories)
 Mendès
 Michaud
 Monsef
 Murray
 Normandin
 Oliphant
 Paupé
 Petitpas Taylor
 Powlowski
 Ratansi
 Robillard
 Rogers
 Sahota (Brampton North)
 Sajjan
 Samson
 Sarai
 Scarpaleggia
 Schulte
 Sgro
 Sheehan
 Sidhu (Brampton South)
 Simms
 Sorbara
 Ste-Marie
 Tassi
 Therrien
 Trudel
 Van Bynen
 Vandal
 Vaughan
 Virani
 Wilkinson
 Yip
 Zahid
 Zuberi — 212

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

The next question is on the main motion.

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. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I request a recorded division.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 106*)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	Amos
Anand	Anandasangaree
Angus	Arseneault
Arya	Ashton
Bachrach	Badawey
Bagnell	Bains
Baker	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu
Beech	Bendayan

Bennett
 Bérubé
 Bibeau
 Blaikie
 Blanchet
 Blaney (North Island—Powell River)
 Boudrias
 Bratina
 Brunelle-Duceppe
 Carr
 Chabot
 Champagne
 Charbonneau
 Collins
 Dabrusin
 Davies
 Desbiens
 Dhaliwal
 Dong
 Dubourg
 Duguid
 Duvall
 Easter
 El-Khoury
 Erskine-Smith
 Fillmore
 Fisher
 Fortier
 Fragiskatos
 Freeland
 Garrison
 Gazan
 Gill
 Green
 Hajdu
 Harris
 Housefather
 Hussen
 Iacono
 Jaczek
 Joly
 Jordan
 Julian
 Khalid
 Koutrakis
 Kwan
 Lambropoulos
 Lamoureux
 Lattanzio
 LeBlanc
 Lefebvre
 Lightbound
 Longfield
 MacAulay (Cardigan)
 MacKinnon (Gatineau)
 Marcil
 Masse
 May (Cambridge)
 McDonald
 McKay
 McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
 McPherson
 Mendicino
 Miller
 Morrissey
 Ng
 O'Connell
 O'Regan
 Perron
 Plamondon
 Qualtrough
 Regan
 Rodriguez

Bergeron
 Bessette
 Bittle
 Blair
 Blanchette-Joncas
 Blois
 Boulterice
 Brière
 Cannings
 Casey
 Chagger
 Champoux
 Chen
 Cormier
 Damoff
 DeBellefeuille
 Desilets
 Dhillon
 Drouin
 Duclos
 Duncan (Etobicoke North)
 Dzerowicz
 Ehsassi
 Ellis
 Fergus
 Finnigan
 Fonseca
 Fortin
 Fraser
 Fry
 Gaudreau
 Gerretsen
 Gould
 Guilbeault
 Hardie
 Holland
 Hughes
 Hutchings
 Ien
 Johns
 Jones
 Jowhari
 Kelloway
 Khera
 Kusmierczyk
 Lalonde
 Lametti
 Larouche
 Lauzon
 LeBouthillier
 Lemire
 Long
 Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
 MacGregor
 Maloney
 Martinez Ferrada
 Mathysen
 McCrimmon
 McGuinty
 McKenna
 McLeod (Northwest Territories)
 Mendès
 Michaud
 Monsef
 Murray
 Normandin
 Oliphant
 Paupé
 Petitpas Taylor
 Powlowski
 Ratansi
 Robillard
 Rogers

Business of Supply

Romanado	Sahota (Brampton North)
Saini	Sajjan
Saks	Samson
Sangha	Sarai
Savard-Tremblay	Scarpaleggia
Schiefke	Schulte
Serré	Sgro
Shanahan	Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton East)	Sidhu (Brampton South)
Simard	Simms
Singh	Sorbara
Spengemann	Ste-Marie
Tabbara	Tassi
Thériault	Therrien
Trudeau	Trudel
Turnbull	Van Bynen
van Koeverden	Vandal
Vandenbeld	Vaughan
Vignola	Virani
Weiler	Wilkinson
Wilson-Raybould	Yip
Young	Zahid
Zann	Zuberi— 210

NAYS**Members**

Abouttaif	Aitchison
Albas	Alleslev
Allison	Arnold
Atwin	Baldinelli
Barlow	Barrett
Benzen	Bergen
Berthold	Bezan
Block	Bragdon
Brassard	Calkins
Carrie	Chiu
Chong	Cooper
Cumming	Dalton
Dancho	Davidson
Deltell	d'Entremont
Diotte	Doherty
Dowdall	Dreeshen
Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry)	Epp
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster)	Falk (Provencher)
Fast	Findlay (South Surrey—White Rock)
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Gallant
Généreux	Genuis
Gladu	Godin
Gourde	Gray
Hallan	Harder
Hoback	Jansen
Jeneroux	Kelly
Kent	Kitchen
Kmiec	Kram
Kurek	Kusie
Lake	Lawrence
Lehoux	Lewis (Essex)
Liepert	Lloyd
Lukiwski	MacKenzie
Maguire	Manly
Martel	May (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
Mazier	McCauley (Edmonton West)
McColeman	McLean
McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo)	Melillo
Moore	Morantz
Morrison	Motz
Nater	O'Toole
Patzer	Paul-Hus
Poillievre	Rayes
Redekopp	Reid
Rempel Garner	Richards
Rood	Ruff

Sahota (Calgary Skyview)	Saroya
Scheer	Schmale
Seeback	Shields
Shin	Shipley
Sloan	Soroka
Stanton	Steinley
Strahl	Stubbs
Sweet	Tochor
Uppal	Van Popta
Vecchio	Vidal
Viersen	Vis
Wagantall	Warkentin
Waugh	Webber
Williamson	Wong
Yurdiga	Zimmer— 122

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.*[English]*

Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY**OPPOSITION MOTION—ALLEGATIONS OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT IN THE MILITARY**

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: I wish to inform the House that, because of the deferred recorded divisions, Government Orders will be extended by 29 minutes.

Resuming debate, we have the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take my time today to put some important issues on the record for the House, the most important of which is ensuring that survivors of sexual misconduct, harassment or assault must feel comfortable coming forward. They must be supported when coming forward.

Eliminating all forms of misconduct and abuses of power, and creating a safe work environment for everyone on the defence team must be our collective priority. Survivors must be at the centre of all that we do. While our government has always made this a top priority, as we have learned, survivors still do not feel safe coming forward.

I am also deeply troubled by the fact the Conservatives are once again ignoring facts and playing political games with a sensitive issue, so let me take the time to lay out the facts.

In 2018, the former national defence ombudsman Gary Walbourne met with the Minister of National Defence. This meeting was a normal meeting with staff, but at the end he asked to speak privately with the minister. He then told the minister he had evidence of misconduct against the former chief of the defence staff.

The minister did not ask for any specifics or details on the nature of the allegations, as was the right thing to do. Instead, he followed a process, the proper process. He immediately had his staff reach out to both the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office. They took the allegation and reached out to the former ombudsman to get details to be able to look into the allegation, but the ombudsman did not have the approval of the complainant to share that information.

Michael Wernick, former clerk of the Privy Council, stated at the national defence committee that, therefore, an impasse was reached and no further action was taken. No further action was taken on an allegation the former ombudsman said was not actionable.

Let us go through the process that was taken right before General Vance's appointment as the new chief of the defence staff in 2015, under a Conservative government. The minister at the time was made aware of an allegation or rumour. He shared it with his chief of staff, who then shared it with the Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister's Office, including the former prime minister's chief of staff. The former prime minister's chief of staff then ensured that the matter was looked into.

Does that sound familiar? It was the same process. The leader of the official opposition thought it was serious enough that he had his staff reach out to the Prime Minister's Office, and he has assured this House and Canadians that the matter was looked into.

Let us explore that, shall we? We heard testimony from Ray Novak, former chief of staff to former prime minister Stephen Harper, that the Conservatives had the national security advisor investigate these rumours. How did he investigate? He went directly to General Vance and asked him about the rumours.

That is wholly inappropriate when someone comes forward with an allegation. I cannot believe the national security advisor would go directly to the person who was being investigated, but he did. General Vance gave assurances that there was nothing there. That is how the Conservatives dealt with it. That is it, and that is all.

We do not know if there was any follow-up. We do not know if it was looked into, but the leader of the official opposition assures us it was looked into. That is shocking, considering all we have heard with regard to the former national security advisor looking into the rumour by asking General Vance his opinion. That is not an appropriate process. Frankly, it is disconcerting that the former Conservative government took the accused General Vance's word for it, especially considering there was already an active investigation into him being conducted by the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service, or the CFNIS.

I would like to remind my hon. colleagues of the very troubling news we learned last week. The CFNIS was actively investigating General Vance in 2015. More specifically, it was investigating General Vance right up until July 17, 2015. Do colleagues know what also happened on July 17, 2015? General Vance was appointed as the new chief of the defence staff.

We then learned through an ATIP request that the commanding officer in charge of the investigation was facing pressure to wrap the investigation up. Pressure from whom exactly? Was it the for-

Business of Supply

mer minister of national defence, the former prime minister, the former parliamentary secretary to the minister of national defence or the current leader of the official opposition?

Surely, we can all agree that politicians should not be involved in investigations, so exerting pressure on an investigation to conclude would be completely inappropriate and, perhaps illegal, yet we still have not received a definitive answer from the Conservatives on who was giving that pressure. No one has answered. No one has provided details.

Could the leader of the official opposition finally give us an answer? So far, the Leader of the Opposition has provided absolutely no details. He has just stated that the way he handled it in 2015 was the proper way and the right way.

● (1545)

However, let us continue with the troubling news from last week because not only was the investigation facing pressure and then abruptly ended, but the investigation was actually officially closed on July 21, 2015, which was four days after General Vance was appointed. Why was the investigation closed four days after he was appointed? Why was it not closed before he was appointed? Why did the Conservative government appoint General Vance in 2015 when an active investigation by the CFNIS was still ongoing?

All of this is incredibly troubling. We not only have rumours that were not investigated properly, but we also have a chief of the defence staff rushed through appointment, even though there was an active investigation ongoing. All of this was because the Conservatives wanted to appoint him before the 2015 election, which was called only a few short weeks later.

Now, the only thing we have heard from Conservative politicians are concerns about the process our government followed, the one that ensured the highest ranking civil service was aware and engaged on the issue, the one that went as far as it could before the former ombudsman stated that he could not provide the information because the complainant had not signed off on it. It is the same process the Conservatives followed in 2015.

The Conservatives say those rumours were acted upon in 2015. What action was different from those we took? They would say that the national security advisor was involved.

Well, the national security advisor in 2018, Daniel Jean, stated that he would not know of the details or be involved in the investigation at that point because there were not enough details to investigate. In fact, he said:

...I wish to indicate that these 2018 allegations were never brought to my attention.

I also think it is important to add that this is not necessarily unusual, particularly, as I explained before, if PCO senior personnel were not able to obtain information that would have allowed and warranted the pursuit of an investigation.

Business of Supply

We know why the NSA was not involved, but the top civil servant in Canada was. So then, what is different about what happened in 2015? If the Conservatives can stand up and explain to this House how it was different, I would be shocked, because it was not. It was the same.

Let me lay out the facts one last time. In 2015, the Conservatives followed the exact same process we did. The Conservatives appointed General Vance when there was an active investigation into him. On the rumours that the leader of the official opposition says were looked into, the only thing we know about how that was looked into is that the national security advisor went directly to General Vance and asked his opinion. Finally, there was pressure on the investigation into General Vance to conclude. This is very concerning, and the House deserves answers from the opposition leader. Canadians deserve answers, and survivors deserve answers.

I will close by saying that the process failed survivors under the Conservative government and under ours. The Prime Minister has clearly stated that this needs to improve, so survivors of sexual violence and harassment receive support and a means to come forward without fear of reprisal.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to say first that I normally have the greatest respect for the member for Oakville North—Burlington, but I am disappointed with her speech today. She is engaging in the “both of us failed, but who failed first and who failed more” argument when it comes to survivors. I am disappointed because there was an opportunity in 2018 for this government to succeed.

The Minister of National Defence was presented with evidence of sexual misconduct. He was told there was evidence of sexual misconduct, and he refused to look at that evidence. He says that he told the Prime Minister's Office, and the Prime Minister's Office took no action. What we have here is a missed opportunity to restore the trust needed for any future reforms to be successful.

Does the member really believe that no one knew that General Vance had been accused of sexual misconduct in 2018? Does she believe that these procedural arguments excuse the failure to investigate and remove him from his role?

• (1550)

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, I sat in on the testimony we had when we were studying Bill C-65, and no one who testified said that politicians should get involved in allegations of sexual misconduct and sexual harassment. We heard that there needed to be independent investigations into those charges, and if it was independent, people might have some confidence to come forward. Even then, they were still fearful.

Now, Lieutenant-General Jennie Carignan, who has just been appointed as chief of professional conduct and culture, will be looking to implement Bill C-65.

I am not saying that one is better than the other, but I am saying that we need to improve the process. I find it really disturbing for the Conservatives to stand in this House and accuse the Liberal government of not following the proper process, when it is exactly the same process that they followed.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the speech from my colleague was very disturbing, and it should be disturbing for the victims.

Like the colleague from Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, the Liberals are just going back six years and pointing their fingers. Does she justify the government's inaction on very clear recommendations from the Deschamps report when the Liberals have been in government for over six years, and when they have made a clear commitment to the women who serve in our military to actually take action?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that we created the sexual misconduct response centre in 2015. I would also remind the hon. member that it was her government that appointed General Vance, ignoring rumours that were heard. I would also remind her that no government has dealt well with getting rid of the toxic masculinity that exists in the armed forces. I would also remind her these women are survivors; they are not victims.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. I know that she unequivocally condemns sexual misconduct in the army.

We all know what has been happening for the past few years. Justice Deschamps wrote a report.

Instead of taking action, the government has asked for a new report from Justice Arbour, who said herself that she was surprised at this request when we already know what the problems are.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks of this new request for a report. Does she think that the government is prepared to act to eliminate all forms of sexual misconduct in the army?

[English]

Ms. Pam Damoff: Mr. Speaker, yes, absolutely we want to act on allegations of sexual misconduct and sexual violence. It is why Madame Arbour has been appointed.

I am not a fan of doing report after report and I think we need to take action. However, we need to find out how we can implement the recommendations of the previous report and also why women still do not feel comfortable coming forward in spite of the fact the response centre was set up in 2015.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Calgary Nose Hill.

I am pleased to speak to this motion. While the Prime Minister continues to say things in his speeches that are not true, we need to continue to tell the truth about him. There is no doubt that over the past six years, this Prime Minister, who calls himself a feminist, has shown Canada that he definitely does not put his money where his mouth is. It is astounding to see how the Prime Minister tells everybody that he would open the door for the cause of Canadian women, yet he never misses an opportunity to throw them under the bus.

The first sign of his duplicity was his treatment of women in his own caucus. Since becoming Prime Minister, he has kicked three women off his team simply because they were not prepared to blindly copy his corrupt ways. They had enough character to say no, while the other members of the Liberal caucus remained silent to avoid being kicked out as well.

Then he dragged his feet when it came to getting answers about the murder of Marylène Levesque, because he knew that the people he appointed to the Parole Board of Canada gave a violent murderer permission to solicit women for sexual services while out on parole. Parliament has been waiting in vain for answers in that case, because the Prime Minister has made sure that we will never get any real answers.

His most recent insult to Canadian women is his statement to the effect that, even though everyone in his entourage knew about the allegations of sexual misconduct against General Vance, he did not. Well, I have no choice but to take his word for it, because we know that this Prime Minister never lies, or so he says.

To help people understand what we are talking about today, I would like to read our motion. It says, and I quote:

That, given that:

- (a) women and all members of the Canadian Armed Forces placed their trust in this government to act on claims of sexual misconduct;
 - (b) the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff was informed about a specific sexual harassment allegation against General Jonathan Vance three years ago;
 - (c) the Prime Minister asserts that this sexual harassment allegation was never brought to his attention; and
 - (d) the Prime Minister said that those in a position of authority have a duty to act upon allegations,
- the House call upon the Prime Minister to dismiss his Chief of Staff for failing to notify him about a serious sexual harassment allegation at the highest ranks of the Canadian Armed Forces and for being complicit in hiding the truth from Canadians.

As members know, Canadians were shocked to learn about the allegations of sexual misconduct against the former chief of the defence staff and the ensuing cover-up. Once again, the Prime Minister claimed that he had no prior knowledge of these accusations, despite testimony indicating that his chief of staff, Katie Telford, had known about it for years.

To add insult to injury, instead of doing the right thing for the women who serve our country in the Canadian Armed Forces, the Prime Minister has decided to bury the file until the next election. After months of reports of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces and Liberal attempts to cover them up, the Prime Minister is now announcing an external review of sexual harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces. We will have to wait at least a year to see the recommendations that come out of that review. This is an insult to the women and men of the Canadian Forces because

Business of Supply

they know that former justice Marie Deschamps already reviewed this issue and produced a report in 2015. There is no need to redo work that was skilfully done by former justice Marie Deschamps.

I do not know Katie Telford personally, so I cannot say if she tends to lie or tell the truth. However, for more than six years now, the Prime Minister has been telling the House that he always tells the truth. Of course, his title includes the words "Right Honourable", so we have no choice but to believe him. If the Prime Minister is telling the truth, and if we assume he never lies, he must fire his chief of staff if he wants Canadians to believe him when he says he was not aware of the evidence of General Vance's sexual misconduct.

Why? If he is telling the truth, that means Katie Telford not only neglected to inform him about a serious sexual misconduct allegation, but also orchestrated a cover-up to hide the truth from Canadians. If the Prime Minister does not fire Katie Telford, that would be an admission that he misled Canadians about his knowledge of the allegations of sexual misconduct against General Vance and that he is complicit in the cover-up.

• (1555)

I am sure members will agree that it is time for the Prime Minister to stop hiding the truth from Canadians and to take responsibility for things that were done in his own office.

Last week's announcement by the government is not action. It is another attempt to take the pressure off the Liberal cover-up. Canadians are not fooled. They have had enough of the Prime Minister's imaginative speeches. They know a lie when they hear one.

They will have the last word the next time they are called upon to vote. In the next election campaign, the Prime Minister will once again ask Canadian women to vote for him. They will answer that he is asking for more than they can give.

• (1600)

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes said something very interesting about this issue a week ago in the House when he asked the Prime Minister a question. He said, "Prime Minister Harper heard a rumour, had the head of CSIS investigate it and then had the courage to sit down, look the general in the eye and ask him questions about it."

I am curious if the member feels as though the prime minister at the time, Prime Minister Harper, did the right thing by sitting down with the general to discuss with this him after he heard the rumour.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

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What I can tell him is that General Vance was initially appointed in 2015. In 2018, even though the new Prime Minister knew about the allegations of sexual misconduct, he extended General Vance's contract by three years.

He did so even though he was aware of the facts and his entourage was aware of the facts, the ombudsman having sent everyone an email on March 2. In spite of that, he extended the general's contract by three years and gave him a \$50,000 raise. I consider this a much more serious problem.

Mrs. Louise Charbonneau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles for his presentation.

First of all, I can say that the Bloc Québécois will vote against this motion. It is not up to the House of Commons to manage the Prime Minister's Office. Assigning the blame for the inaction of the Minister of National Defence and the Prime Minister to an employee would create a dangerous precedent. Why try to assign the blame to an employee who is only following her boss' orders?

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very relevant question.

It is important to understand the situation. We know that the chief of staff was aware of the facts and that the Prime Minister says he was not aware of the facts. If the Prime Minister's chief of staff, who has an extremely important role in the Canadian government, did not tell her boss, she deserves to be severely reprimanded and, in our opinion, fired outright.

If the Prime Minister was aware, however, then the problem is altogether different. That is what we are waiting to hear from the Prime Minister.

[English]

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I had a member of the military, a young woman, reach out to my office. She did not feel comfortable reaching out to either the Conservatives or the Liberals. She expressed concern that the systematic problems within the military were so deep that it would require such fundamental change.

One of the things I know my colleagues in the NDP have been calling for is to finally have the office of the Canadian Forces and national defence ombudsperson be made a fully independent officer of Parliament, with the ability to independently investigate matters such as this. Would the member agree that it is finally time to make that office fully independent?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. Having served in the Canadian Armed Forces myself for 22 years, I have seen and experienced many different situations.

That is why the Conservative government of the day mandated Justice Marie Deschamps to investigate and issue a report. The report was clear, and one of the things it recommended was that mechanisms be put in place to enable victims to come forward with complaints. This is what the Liberal government has failed to do for the past six years.

I understand why that individual reached out to my colleague, but I can tell her that we, the Conservatives, have always protected victims and that we are still here today. That is why we gave Madame Deschamps that mandate at the time.

• (1605)

[English]

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Mr. Speaker, the Deschamps report is very clear. We need an independent body that investigates sexual misconduct in the army. I have heard from constituents who have dealt with sexual assault complaints that were not taken seriously by the military and were not taken seriously by the RCMP. It is clear that women are not getting the service they need when they bring these complaints forward and they are not being taken seriously.

I would support this motion if it were to ask that the Deschamps report and its recommendations be fully implemented. I wonder why that is not what this motion is about. Would the member support that?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question.

We agree. The Conservatives commissioned the report by Justice Deschamps at the time, but there had been a change in government by the time the report was filed. If the Conservatives had remained in government, we obviously would have implemented the recommendations, which were valid. It is hard to understand why the Liberal government has done nothing with this.

We can also understand why all the victims in the Canadian Armed Forces are afraid to come forward when they see what is happening with the chief of the defence staff and the Prime Minister's Office.

That is why there needs to be change, and soon.

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, systemic misogyny persists when silence gives cover to the sins of powerful men. I have heard a lot of sanctimony here today, so let us start with the facts. Every political party that has participated in debate today has members who have been silent and given cover for the sins of powerful men, so let us not kid ourselves about that.

We do not need another report to provide justice for women in the military. We need courage, and we need to stop the garbage that is happening here. I have been in this place for 10 years, and I have experienced systemic misogyny. I have had my rear end fondled, I have been called every name in the book and I have watched other women come behind me and have the same experiences. I have publicly called out my party when I have had instances come to light within my own tent, because I have had to, or my silence would have provided cover for the sins of powerful men.

We do not need another report. We need courage. Every single party here has had it happen in their own tent, including the NDP, the Liberals and the Green Party, which had an article in the *Toronto Star*. It is enough. I am so tired of listening to people finger-point. Are people really going to blame Stephen Harper? Not a single Liberal backbencher has stood up and said that maybe the defence minister did something wrong.

The only way things change is when people have the courage to speak up and demand change within their own tent. I have watched quarter be given for six years, under the watch of the government, to the most senior people in government. I have watched, at the same relative time as the allegations about General Vance came out, the Prime Minister have an unresolved groping allegation. Not a single Liberal has called this out within their own tent, not one, and if one wants to stand up today and talk about Prime Minister Harper to me, they had better start by addressing that, which has never been addressed.

I watched them unceremoniously can the member for Vancouver Granville and Jane Philpott for daring to speak truth to power. Not a single Liberal spoke up for these women speaking truth, not one, so if a Liberal wants to get up and talk about Prime Minister Harper, they had better speak up about that injustice first.

Then we have the member for Kitchener South—Hespeler, who the Liberals allowed to run for them knowing there were substantiated harassment allegations. Not a single Liberal spoke up about that, not one, so if somebody wants to get up and talk to me about Prime Minister Harper, they had better speak out about that. When a similar thing happened in my party, I trotted myself out into the House of Commons and said, “No. No more. This has to change,” so if somebody wants to ask me about Prime Minister Harper, they had better be asking about that.

I am just furious. Can members imagine being a member of the armed forces and watching this debate today? Of course we need to call out the people who are at the highest level of power, because they are the ones who give silence to the sins of powerful men. We should not kid ourselves that the Prime Minister's Office did not know about this. It is just ridiculous. Now there will be another report. What we need to be doing is saying no more silence in any political tent.

There should not be quarter anywhere. I am tired of having to do the heavy lifting, as a woman. It gets really tiring to have to explain to people that silence is complicity and that when we cover it up within our own tent, it tells the people in our tent that there will be no justice. That is what is happening with the defence minister right now. In question period after question period, it is Stephen Harper's fault. Members should look inwardly, and somebody should call it out. Somebody should say this cannot continue.

With every program we put in place we can put hundreds of millions of dollars and ask every Supreme Court justice in the world to do another report, but if silence gives quarter to the sins of powerful men, systemic misogyny persists. I have always put my money where my mouth is on this issue, and I have watched other women in this place do the same. I give kudos to Jane Philpott. She went to the wall for her colleague because she knew she was doing the right thing, but silence is rewarded around here. It is rewarded with pro-

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motion. Do members know what is not rewarded? It is courage. Do members know what is rewarded? It is covering up stuff like this.

● (1610)

Honestly, that is what is rewarded. That is what is wrong with government and that is what is wrong with power systems in this country. I cannot believe that we are having a debate when Liberal members have not once had the courage to publicly speak out in any form, even anonymously, by saying, “Hey, I have concerns about the competency of the defence minister” or, “Hey, what about the Prime Minister's chief of staff? Surely she must have known something.” Then people bring her gender into it. That is disgusting too. Come on.

Misogyny knows no gender. There are women who cover up the sins of men with their silence and we should not give them quarter just because of their gender either. Something happened here over the last six years. There is evidence upon evidence. We have someone offering to give a lie detector test. A woman in the Armed Forces watching this says, “Get your act together. I do not need another report, I need safety and I need the people who have covered this up to come to justice”.

I have a stepdaughter who is serving in the United States armed forces and she is incredible. She inspires me every day. She is watching this debate. She is watching one of her allied countries and literally watching members of Parliament talk about some other guy who was not here six years ago. He is not the prime minister any more, okay? He is not the prime minister. Somebody else is, and somebody else was in charge of this.

To keep deflecting this, to not have a way forward, to not hold people to account, to give quarter to this is everything that is wrong with this system and it is every reason why systemic misogyny exists. I am tired of having to stand up here and call people to account. It makes me angry, it makes me frustrated and it makes me sad as a Canadian. Honestly, somebody needs to be fired over this, and systems need to be put in place to make sure that nobody ever gets promoted within a cabinet or within a Prime Minister's Office again who knew about this, for now and forever going forward.

My party is not perfect. The NDP is not perfect. The Green Party is not and the Liberals are not either, but they are in power today and they have the power to change things. They are in power, and if they want to show Canadian women that they have any credibility at all on feminism, they have to deal with the fact that they are continually and perpetually silent on these issues, every single time. Any time there is any sort of sexual harassment or misconduct or whatever it is, there is silence and crickets across their backbench. That is wrong and that is what the report is going to tell us. Liberals do not need to pay somebody else to do that or another five years: They need change.

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I dare somebody to ask me a question right now about Stephen Harper. Whoever does that had better stand and say what the defence minister did is wrong right now, and that they stand in solidarity with me across political lines, across partisanship and stand up for justice for the women in the Armed Forces and for every woman who suffers from systemic misogyny and systemic racism in this country. Enough is enough. If we stand here and keep bickering along partisan lines to keep protecting the people up our food chains, nothing will ever change.

• (1615)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the intervention on some level. I, too, am angry about misogyny and sexism although I find the member's comments incredibly hypocritical given her party's position on a woman's right to choose.

My question does not involve former prime minister Harper, it is about the member's leader now. She talks about people getting a promotion who knew. What about her own leader? He got a promotion to become leader and he knew about these rumours and allegations.

Why is it always women who have to shoulder the responsibility for the actions and accusations of men? The member is advocating for firing a woman for what she supposedly knew, or did not know, yet she is not calling for her own leader's resignation for what he knew.

Why is it always women shouldering the consequences for the actions of men and the perpetrators of this violence?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, let the record show that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health holds the biggest parliamentary record for missing the point, missing the boat and lack of courage.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order, order. The hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her passionate speech. I completely agree with her that we do not need another report. We just need a bit of courage.

Imagine if the Liberal Party got rid of everyone who contributes to this tradition of misogyny and this culture of silence. I suspect that a lot of people would leave, but if they did that, then what?

What does my colleague propose as a solution for putting an end to this type of behaviour once and for all?

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, the answer is this: clean house, no quarter.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Calgary Nose Hill, not just for her passionate speech today, but for her standing up for women the whole time I have served with her in Parliament and also for standing up for my own community on issues of sexual ori-

entation and gender identity. I do agree that the member puts her money where her mouth is.

We may disagree on some details about the motion today, but my question for her is whether she would agree with me that reforms going forward have little chance of being taken seriously by either survivors or perpetrators if no one pays the price for the silence in 2018.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, he is right.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my friend from Calgary Nose Hill for her impassioned speech. She has been a true champion of fighting misogyny, fighting discrimination and fighting against this type of sexual violence. I want to thank her husband and her stepdaughter for their service in the United States armed services.

I know that she lives this and understands all too well what needs to be done going forward. I also know that, for whatever reason, people are trying to make an excuse for Katie Telford, who may be very complicit in this cover-up for the past three years.

I would ask my colleague and friend if she could talk about what steps need to be taken now so that women and men can feel safe in the Canadian Armed Forces from being harassed.

• (1620)

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, I said it before and I will say it again: clean house, no quarter.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her very emotional speech.

Earlier I was wondering: If this is what a self-styled feminist Prime Minister does, what would be happening if he were not a feminist?

There is one aspect of these allegations of sexual misconduct that I think is very important and is not mentioned much, but I think it makes General Vance's case even worse. He was in a position of authority when he allegedly perpetrated this sexual misconduct. This is a man with a great deal of authority, which unfortunately makes this situation even worse.

I have two questions for my colleague. First, is there anything pertinent that might come out of this second review?

Second, does she want the Minister of National Defence to resign?

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Speaker, nothing will change as long as the men who have perpetrated this type of abuse and the people who have stood idly by and watched it, knowing full well what was happening, are allowed to have continued employment. The government needs to clean house across every place where this has happened, everybody who knew about it, and there needs to be no quarter.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member of Parliament for Peterborough—Kawartha.

I rise today to discuss an important issue for the women and men who serve our country, and indeed for all Canadians: how we can best ensure that members of the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces are guaranteed a safe, respectful and harassment-free work environment.

All members of this House know that Canadians deserve nothing less, and our government will accept nothing less. Our government has always taken allegations of sexual misconduct extremely seriously. Whenever any allegations against anyone in the Canadian Armed Forces have been raised to him, regardless of rank or position, the Minister of National Defence has acted diligently and referred them to the relevant authorities.

When the Minister of National Defence was made aware of the allegations against the then chief of the defence staff in 2018, he acted immediately and they were referred to the Privy Council, which manages order in council appointments. This is the exact same process followed by the previous Conservative government, including the now Leader of the Opposition.

However, we know we need to do more and we need to create better systems. The minister and our entire government continue to take this issue extremely seriously. Though our work is nowhere near done, we have made progress. Our government established the sexual misconduct response centre, or SMRC, which offers members confidential support 24-7 anywhere in the world. I am happy to say that budget 2021 increases our investment in the SMRC.

Since the SMRC operates outside the military chain of command, reporting directly to the deputy minister, it allows affected persons to access support in a confidential manner. The SMRC offers many programs and services to help affected members. One of them is the response and support coordination program, which helps Canadian Armed Forces members navigate systems from the moment they make contact with the SMRC until they decide they no longer require support. At every step of the way, SMRC personnel accompany those affected by sexual violence, providing whatever support may be necessary.

Canadian Armed Forces members seeking information about the reporting process can contact the SMRC to explore their options while remaining anonymous. Civilian members of the defence team can also access support through the SMRC, as well as through the employee assistance program.

Though the SMRC is an important tool, we have not gotten this right yet and our work is far from over. That is why Canada's defence team is in the midst of a top-to-bottom change of its institutional culture. This is the right thing to do. It is not just a moral imperative; it is also vital to the success of the Canadian Armed Forces now and into the future. Only when members have complete trust in one another can they perform at the highest levels as a team.

Our goal is to create a defence team where all members feel valued, included and supported by their peers and leaders, an organization where sexual misconduct is never ignored, minimized or excused. To achieve this transformation, we must make sure that members of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence who have been affected by sexual misconduct are supported every step of the way.

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Last week, we announced some steps to get us there. First of all, the Government of Canada has initiated an independent external comprehensive review led by former Supreme Court Justice Louise Arbour. This review will look into harassment and sexual misconduct in DND and the Canadian Armed Forces and will examine policies, procedures, programs, practices and culture within national defence and make recommendations for improvement. We will learn from what did not work and build on what did.

• (1625)

Second, the Department of National Defence will work with Veterans Affairs Canada to develop a professionally co-facilitated peer support program to assist Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans who have suffered harm as a result of experiencing sexual misconduct in connection with their military service. This peer support program will be available online and in person and is fully resourced through funding included in budget 2021. Budget 2021 also includes funding to enhance other support services, including access to free, independent legal advice, and will help enable Canadian Armed Forces members to access support without making a formal complaint.

Third, we announced that Lieutenant-General Jennie Carignan will begin a new role as the chief of professional conduct and culture, which will unify, integrate and coordinate all policies, programs and activities that currently address systemic misconduct across culture change.

In addition to these steps, our government is following through on its commitment to consult with victims of service offences, which will inform the development of the regulations needed to implement the declaration of victims rights from Bill C-77. National Defence has engaged directly with victims groups and will soon be launching an online questionnaire to collect anonymous feedback from DND employees and Canadian Armed Forces members. To the victims groups that have generously devoted their time and energy to sharing lived experiences and feedback with the government, I want to say this: We have heard everyone; we are taking action and there is much more to come.

Today, I want to highlight some of the resources available to Canadian Armed Forces members to access counselling, advice and other support services. The resources include Canadian Armed Forces medical centres, military chaplains, the Canadian Forces member assistance program, military family resource centres, and the family information line.

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Another avenue for members to bring forward concerns or incidents is through one of the 16 complaint management centres, located across the country, under the integrated conflict and complaint management program. This service combines harassment, grievance and alternate dispute resolution approaches in a streamlined fashion. They report, track and resolve complaints of inappropriate behaviour like sexual harassment.

If the nature of the sexual misconduct requires the involvement of the military police and justice system, there are supports for Canadian Armed Forces members during this process as well. The military police have established six sexual offence response teams trained to handle sexual misconduct cases appropriately and with empathy. These teams are sensitive to survivors and help them connect with other resources and support systems they may need.

In addition, the director of military prosecutions has established the sexual misconduct action response team, made up of specially trained prosecutors. Their role, again, is to make sure survivors are treated with compassion and understanding, and that they receive the information and support they need throughout military justice proceedings.

We know that supporting survivors of sexual misconduct is essential, and that is why the military has taken steps to ensure that support is available and provided from the moment a person seeks advice or counsel through investigation and prosecution. Along with future changes, these steps will help build a healthy, safe and inclusive workplace where all people are supported and treated with respect.

We know that there is much more work to be done, and our government will continue consulting with experts and those who have been affected by sexual misconduct.

• (1630)

I know that together we will create a defence workplace where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. We will build the right systems so that when an incident occurs, members of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence have access to a process that is sensitive, fair and compassionate. We are listening—

The Deputy Speaker: We will need to leave it there. The time for the member's speech has expired, and we will now go to questions and comments.

We will first go to the hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how the member can say what she just said. I have laid case after case on the desk, right here in this chamber, of the defence minister so he can follow up on acts of sexual misconduct, sexual assault and brutal rape.

Do members know what happens? The woman gets farmed off to another residence. She is off her course. The perpetrator even admits on tape to the police that he did it, and what happens? He continues on as though nothing happened, and she is sent off to another province. What does the padre say to her? He says that she is in the

military now and is owned by the military, and if she knows what is good for her she will forget about it and carry on.

How can the member say that everything is being done and is on the way to being corrected when that type of situation is still happening in our Canadian Armed Forces?

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the hon. colleague that our government has absolutely no tolerance for misconduct. We need to get the politics out of this and focus on how we can change the culture in the armed forces to ensure that [*Technical difficulty—editor*] place so that when someone wishes to move forward with a complaint, they have confidence that their complaint will be taken seriously.

At the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, we have heard powerful testimony from people who have experienced the toxic culture first-hand. We have also heard many excellent suggestions on how to take on that culture and how to build independent and external reporting systems. I hope the recommendations that our committee will make to the government will form part of the government's comprehensive response to the issue and contribute to positive change and improvement.

• (1635)

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one of the real issues here is that a culture change typically involves somebody at the top taking some responsibility for what is not going right. In this case, we have already had a number of studies, including one recently, just six years ago, about how to make changes to change the culture in the military to punish instances of sexual abuse rather than allow people to get promoted. The government's response has been for nobody to take responsibility and to have a study of the last study.

How does anybody who is concerned about seeing this culture change take any real solace or comfort, or have confidence, in the proposal of the government in the face of further reports of failure, in this case at the highest levels, both of government and the military?

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the measures we have taken since we came into government have not gone far enough. That is why we announced last week that Madam Arbour will conduct an independent review of the Canadian Armed Forces, which will include the creation of an external reporting system that is independent from the chain of command and meets the needs of those impacted by sexual misconduct and violence. We owe it to our members and to Canadians to get this right.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Pausé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague just asked Madame Arbour to make recommendations on the recommendations made by Madame Deschamps. My colleague also said that her government is taking this seriously. Is this really what she considers taking things seriously?

An analyst and journalist compared the two news releases about Madame Arbour and Madame Deschamps and said that they were essentially the same.

I repeat: Does my colleague really think the government is taking this seriously?

[English]

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Mr. Speaker, I suggest that our focus should be on how we can create a safer future for women and indeed for everyone who serves in our armed forces. There is much to be learned from the Deschamps report, and I look forward to Justice Arbour building on her work with her independent review of the Canadian Armed Forces, which will include the creation of an external reporting system that is independent from the chain of command and meets the needs of those impacted by sexual misconduct and violence.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Vancouver East, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship; the hon. member for Regina—Wascana, Natural Resources; and the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, Canadian Heritage.

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am on Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg territory and so grateful to my colleagues for their thoughtful debate today. They have focused on survivors and how to move forward. Also, I want to acknowledge that many Muslims working with us are fasting right now, so *Ramadan kareem* to them.

I will focus my remarks on what we have heard from survivors, on the work done to date and the work moving forward.

Let me thank survivors who have taken the time to talk to me and our colleagues, who have shared their accounts and who continue to guide us in this very important work. I think all of us agree that we want them to be safe. They have chosen these difficult jobs, which require many sacrifices. Those who are charged with keeping us safe deserve to be safe with their colleagues and in their workplaces. We want their parents, their spouses and their children to know that when they go to work they will be safe with their colleagues, when they come home they feel like their service and contributions matter and when they come forward there is a place for them that is independent from the chain of command and treats them with respect and dignity.

From the moment we formed government, we have taken serious action to address and prevent gender-based violence in all of its forms in institutions like Parliament, in homes and in communities across the country. However, we must do more and faster.

We are the first government to put forward a serious federal plan to address and prevent gender-based violence. We are the first government to make women's health, women's safety and women's labour force participation anchors of our economic growth strategy. We have the humility to acknowledge that gender-based violence is complex and that we cannot eradicate it on our own. We have a track record that allows us to work with necessary partners, organizations, survivors and experts like Madam Arbour to do better, faster.

One thing that survivors I have spoken to have taught me is that 50 years ago, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in

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Canada tabled a report that included a few recommendations for the CAF, the Canadian Armed Forces. Those recommendations asked us to open all trades to women in the CAF, to stop prohibiting married women from enlisting, to stop releasing women from the forces when they have kids and to pay women and men equally in the forces. Survivors reminded me that it was not until 1989 that almost all occupations were open to women, and that it was not until 2001 that the submarine service was open to women. Survivors have taught me and all of us that gender-based violence and sexual misconduct are a symptom of a much bigger issue and that, rather than expect women, gender-diverse folks and racialized folks to assimilate into the armed forces, much more needs to be done to integrate women, gender-diverse folks and BIPOCs into the armed forces so that they feel safe and welcomed.

We want to ensure meaningful change. The survivors who have come forward with courage have asked us for meaningful change. I can appreciate that they are skeptical. For too long, too many governments have let them down. Every government has. I can assure them that we hear them, that their stories and accounts matter and that change is already happening.

The allegations and the accounts shared by survivors have been deeply troubling, often triggering other survivors and victims of sexual assault, including in the House. Their accounts have led to meaningful discussions on how to improve culture in the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence, and we hear them. While some progress has been made, it is clear that it has not been enough, that it has not been fast enough and that we must go further.

The underlying reasons for cultural issues that persisted in the armed force and defence were never truly understood. We take this work seriously and we are taking serious action. As we build on the foundation and the partnerships that we have formed since day one of coming into office, we will continue to keep survivors at the heart of this work.

• (1640)

The House of Commons is an important place for progress to be made. Concrete action has been taken, such as introducing a federal strategy to address and prevent gender-based violence that breaks down traditional silos and is saving and transforming lives.

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We have introduced measures to develop a more comprehensive and equitable criminal justice system, including ensuring a clearer definition of consent; strengthening laws against gender-based violence and intimate partner violence; toughening bail eligibility for repeat offenders; introducing five days of paid leave for survivors of family violence so they can get the help they need; supporting legislation that ensures judges receive training on gender-based violence, counteracting centuries of common misconceptions, biases and myths about sexual assault.

We are working with indigenous partners, those in territories and provinces, to move forward, after 38 years of the federal-provincial table on the status of women meeting, with a national action plan on gender-based violence so no matter where they are, survivors can count on reliable supports.

This past year, we have helped close to one million women, children and gender-diverse folks during the pandemic to find safety and supports. Every year, programming through women and gender equality supports saves and transforms the lives of some six million Canadians.

Moving forward, survivors continue to deserve trauma-informed, culturally sensitive supports and a system that allows them to seek justice.

Budget 2021 includes \$3 billion to address and prevent gender-based violence in all its forms. It includes \$236 million to address and prevent sexual misconduct in the military. That fund is going to provide a professionally, co-facilitated peer support program. It is going to enhance supports to the sexual misconduct and response centre, which we have heard much about during the debate.

I will take this time to thank those who work as the SMRC as well as its founding members who have worked so hard. This is emotionally labourious work, and they ought to be saluted.

The budget includes \$70 million to research women's health and to support access to sexual and reproductive health; \$160 million to support the mental health of Canadians; a serious investment in early learning and child care; and, of course, \$600 million to move forward with a national action plan.

As for the armed forces, they will dig deep to root out the harmful attitudes and beliefs that have corrupted their culture and enabled misconduct. They will eliminate discrimination, biases, harmful stereotypes and systemic barriers to create a truly diverse and inclusive workforce and culture. Most important, they will listen and learn from their people, past and present, as they work to rebuild trust, and we will be there working with them and moving them forward, ensuring survivors remain at the heart of this work.

As the Minister of National Defence said last week to every member in the armed forces and to every person in the Department of National Defence who has been affected by sexual harassment and violence, we are truly sorry. We regret the pain that this has caused them and their families, and we regret the talent and the contributions that their country has missed out on. We know the current reporting systems do not meet their needs, and that they do not feel able to report misconduct out of fear of reprisal or retribution. We know that culture change is key. We have heard them when they have said sexual misconduct is a symptom of the prob-

lem, not the root of it, and that we need to have a more holistic approach to this work.

We know that the work ahead is difficult, but we also know that the institution we are talking about is strong enough for this change. Clearly, every member of the House is ready, willing and able to support the institution in this important cultural change.

• (1645)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member works very hard when it comes to violence against women and sexual harassment. However, I am really concerned that the higher ups, the people in the PMO and the defence minister, did not recognize there was such a problem.

I am looking at this and I am concerned. The minister and I have both looked at everything on the status of women and we know that it is report after report. Today, we are talking about the government providing another report in response. Will another report do the job?

Second, obviously the Prime Minister and the defence minister are reaching out to the minister on this issue. Did she ask about what they would do better and about a follow up? How did the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence talk to the her about this and how did they approach what has just happened in the Canadian Armed Forces under their watch?

• (1650)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her passion and commitment to advancing women and gender equality.

The work Madame Arbour is doing, as the member has heard from Madame Deschamps, will build on the report that was presented. This phase of the response is not about whether changes need to be made, it is about how to make them.

In addition to the report, we are also very much looking forward to Lieutenant-General Carignan doing her important work to have a one-stop shop that addresses equity and gender-based violence within the military system. It is important. For example, we know there is data, but it is all over the place and it is difficult to access. That is one example of the challenges we are trying to solve. Both Madame Arbour's report and the work Lieutenant-General Carignan will do will matter.

In addition, the budget includes \$236 million, which I really hope we are able to pass together, to support survivors.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is a very concerning issue. I am wondering about the Liberal record in the use of the previous Deschamps report. Andrew Leslie, who served in the military as lieutenant-general, served as the Liberal government whip and was in the Liberal cabinet during this time frame.

I would like to know from the member whether she or her government have reached out to Andrew Leslie to get his perspective. He was lieutenant-general for the land forces for a number of years, the chief government whip and a Liberal member of Parliament for Orleans.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Speaker, I would like to assure my colleague that my time is spent listening to experts, listening to survivors who have the courage to come forward and connecting with colleagues in the House as well as defence and armed forces to ensure we get it right this time.

[Translation]

Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Justice Deschamps presented a damning report in 2015, demonstrating that there is a sexist culture within the armed forces, which ignored cases of sexual misconduct.

This report contained 10 recommendations, and the main recommendation was to make the complaints system independent from the armed forces. Justice Deschamps testified in committee in February. She pointed out that, unfortunately, the centre is not independent from the armed forces.

I am trying to understand whether my colleague, who is the Minister for Women and Gender Equality, is comfortable being part of a government that wants a new report but is not even capable of implementing the main recommendation from a report that came out more than five years ago.

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague can appreciate, the issues around gender-based violence are complex and deeply rooted in society. However, sexual misconduct and gender-based violence within institutions like military are even more complex. The work Madame Deschamps did years ago is important. It has allowed the government and the DND to make progress, but far more work needs to be done.

Madame Arbour's work will allow us to move forward. However, we will not wait for a report as she hears testimony. As we continue to hear from survivors, we will be sure to implement measures that improve the safety and well-being of all members in the DND and the armed forces.

Of course, we are also looking for any ideas this chamber may have. In addition to that independent review, what else can we do as parliamentarians to change the conversation about gender-based violence and workplace harassment, not just in the armed forces but in every workplace?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Lakeland.

Business of Supply

As the member of Parliament for Garrison Petawawa, located in the force-wielding riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, soldiers know I will always have their back.

It is a great disappointment to Canadians that once again the Prime Minister has chosen to waste the public's valuable time. Our economy is about to burn. The raging pandemic is worsening. All the while, the Prime Minister insists the Conservative government-in-waiting deal with the problem of toxic masculinity.

This motion is to dismiss his hapless employee, Katie Telford. Another woman will be sacrificed, in this case, for her misplaced loyalty. The Prime Minister's toxic masculinity is out of control. It has been for a very long time.

The Prime Minister's toxic masculinity problem is a Liberal brand problem. It must be degrading to be a female member of the Liberal Party and be forced to continually have to apologize and make excuses for the Prime Minister's toxic masculinity.

The member for Kanata—Carleton wore the uniform of a member of the Canadian Armed Forces. Does she and her female colleagues, like the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, the member for Ottawa West—Nepean, not realize that by defending the Prime Minister's unacceptable misogynist behaviour, they are enabling his toxic masculinity? Do women in the Liberal Party not see the pattern of behaviour? Do these women really think the former female minister of justice, the former female minister of health, the Prime Minister's own former female parliamentary secretary were all wrong in refusing to put up with the Prime Minister's toxic masculinity? It all comes down to power.

Another female in the Liberal Party who thought she had power, Katie Telford, is being thrown under the bus by the Prime Minister. He has become the laughing stock of world leaders with his black-face and his Mr. dress-up cultural appropriation antics.

If Katie Telford, as the Prime Minister's chief of staff, cannot understand she should have resigned months ago, she must be fired by the Prime Minister. It is not as if she does not know the Prime Minister has a serious problem with toxic masculinity. Her job as chief of staff is to say no every time the Prime Minister has an ethical and moral lapse in judgment. Gerald Butts failed to do his job and fell on his sword. Now it is time for Katie Telford to do the same.

Toxic masculinity is a Liberal problem. On International Women's Day I asked the Minister of National Defence a simple question. Who was the minister trying to protect, himself or the Prime Minister? That same question has now been answered by the Prime Minister's female chief of staff, now that the story from the Prime Minister is that his chief of staff withheld important information from him.

It was the Prime Minister who shut down the investigation by the Standing Committee on National Defence into the appalling record of the government in defending gender equality for women serving their country in the military. Operation Honour, the Canadian Armed Forces mission to prevent and address sexual misconduct within its ranks, was doomed from the outset.

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How could anyone in government take Operation Honour seriously? Soldiers dubbed it “Operation Hop On Her”. Why would anyone take it seriously, when the Prime Minister was not taking the concerns of sexual harassment of female soldiers seriously?

The same can be said about the Prime Minister’s chief of staff. She obviously does not take the concerns of sexual harassment of female soldiers seriously, if we believe the Prime Minister’s claim that his chief of staff could not be bothered to inform him of claims of sexual misconduct.

This is the same Prime Minister who, when confronted with the facts surrounding his groping of a young female reporter, claimed that she must have experienced it differently. That is the classic “blame the victim” trope.

The Prime Minister’s toxic masculinity is a festering sore that has infected the entire Liberal Party. Now the Prime Minister has directed female members of his caucus to look for someone or something else to blame.

According to the female member of parliament for Ottawa West—Nepean, it is the culture of toxic masculinity from the Canadian Armed Forces that is to blame. Blame the soldiers for the breakdown in leadership that stops at the top with the Prime Minister.

● (1655)

Not to be outdone to curry favour from the Prime Minister, the female member from the rural Newfoundland and Labrador riding of Long Range Mountains, even went further in trying to tie toxic masculinity in Canada’s military to Canadians recruited from rural Canada. Her Liberal talking points somehow tied Canadians from rural Canada, who joined Canada’s Armed Forces as convenient scapegoats. She is from rural Canada, in this case Atlantic Canada, indicating the member’s experience is with her own constituents. As they say in Atlantic Canada, the fish rots from the head.

Liberal Female MPs, such as the ones for Pickering—Uxbridge and for Newfoundland and Labrador, should be ashamed when the name of the leader of the Liberal Party is used in the same paragraph as Harvey Weinstein’s and Jeffrey Epstein’s to make the point that Canada is going backward, not forward, when it comes to making progress in combatting sexual misconduct and violence against women in all its ugly faces.

Toxic masculinity is not a military problem; it is a Liberal Party problem.

The greatest disappointment in this entire discussion has been the deafening silence from the female Liberal caucus. Its members have quietly condoned the Prime Minister’s behaviour with their silence. Not one female Liberal MP rose to defend the female reporter who was subjected to an unwanted sexual advance by the Prime Minister in her workplace: the Kokanee grope. Not one government MP rose to demand a coherent explanation of what the Prime Minister admitted to doing when he was shamed into providing an apology to the young female reporter who was the subject of his unwanted advance. Enabling bad behaviour guarantees it will continue, like blaming the victim. Silence is tacit approval.

The problem of toxic masculinity starts at the top with the Prime Minister. He has an outrageous record of making bad decisions when it comes to Canada’s military. This policy failure of the Prime Minister and his government, and his failure to deal with sexual harassment in the military, can be traced to his treatment of women. It is no different from the way the Prime Minister treats women in his own party, such as the former justice minister during the SNC-Lavalin scandal.

This is what a former female Ontario Liberal member and member of the Prime Minister’s caucus had to say:

In a feminist government, throwing [female members of Parliament] under the bus, I didn’t appreciate that, especially at a time when we’re saying that we believe in women. You believe in them when it’s convenient and you leave them when it’s not. So there were just a number of different instances that just didn’t sit right with me and the principles that I hold dear, and I wanted to make sure that I was able to look at myself in the mirror the next day.

How can female Liberal members of Parliament still look at themselves in the mirror every day knowing that, after Operation Honour was blown out of the water? It recorded 581 incidents of sexual assault and 221 cases of sexual harassment between April 1, 2016 and March 9, 2021. The Prime Minister thinks that having female members of his caucus mouth empty platitudes will fool women. He sure does not fool this “proud to be Conservative” female member of Parliament.

● (1700)

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her surreal speech. There is a funny new word that I think might apply. We hear more and more about people being “woke”. This was like a woke debate on acid, but I will leave it at that.

My colleague seems to be particularly fond of the concept of toxic masculinity. I find that all the more unusual because she belongs to a party that constantly challenges women’s right to have control over their own bodies when it comes to abortion, but let us leave that aside for now.

We know that the government dragged its feet or simply failed to act in the case of General Vance. We also know that the initial allegations against General Vance were made in 2015. The Conservatives decided to ignore those allegations. They are the ones who appointed General Vance.

Was the Harper government demonstrating toxic masculinity at that time?

[English]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, he goes off on tangents and deflects. In 2015, the current leader of Her Majesty’s official opposition heard a rumour and based on rumour alone took it to the Prime Minister’s Office to have investigated. Here we have a minister who had the ombudsman for the military come with actual evidence of inappropriate sexual behaviour. What did he do? He said he did not want to see it. He swept it under the rug and then denied, deflected, delayed, until maybe it would go away, there would be an election and then we could all start over again. That is not going to happen this time.

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• (1705)

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke a lot about toxic masculinity and I want to follow up on the comments from my colleague from the Bloc from 2015. Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the Premier of Alberta, the then minister of national defence, Jason Kenney, were aware of the allegations and the investigation being conducted in 2015. That is not up for debate.

Does the member not worry that by attacking one of the only women involved in the Prime Minister's Office in this issue, that she is in fact punishing a woman while allowing that same toxic masculinity that we saw with Stephen Harper, that we saw with Jason Kenney, that we see with the current Prime Minister and the current Minister of National Defence, is she not allowing that toxic masculinity to continue?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, first of all, the allegations about former members of the Conservative Party are irrelevant and unfounded completely. In terms of the Prime Minister's chief of staff, we are not punishing her, we have invited her to come before committee and explain herself. All these allegations are being made. We want her to be heard. We want her to have a voice. That is why we have invited her, so we can get to the truth.

Mr. Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like my hon. colleague's opinion on the best way forward to hold the Prime Minister to account. Ultimately it was his chief of staff who failed to provide the information to him that this was a sexual misconduct allegation against the chief of the defence staff. Again, what we are debating today is why the chief of staff failed to bring that information forward to the Prime Minister.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, again, at committee we asked her to come forward to be able to defend herself. Did she really give the Prime Minister executive deniability by not telling him about the situation or is she being thrown under the bus? We want to give her a chance.

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs (Lakeland, CPC): Mr. Speaker, "There is no room in the Canadian Armed Forces for sexism, misogyny, racism, anti-Semitism, discrimination, harassment or any other conduct that prevents the institution from being a truly welcoming and inclusive organization." That is how the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence began her reply to an Order Paper question from the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke detailing how the Canadian Armed Forces deal with sexual misconduct. I want to give kudos to my colleague from Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke for her powerful and utter indictment that she just delivered.

It is becoming disturbingly clear that the Liberals have actually allowed room for sexual misconduct and harassment in the military despite all their rhetoric. Doubtlessly, they would be happy to take credit for how much progress has been made otherwise. Indeed, the defence minister, in particular, is not shy about taking credit, as he did when he stole valour and claimed to be the architect of Operation Medusa, but true to pattern, the Liberals are dodging, shutting down committees, keeping staff from being questioned and embroiled in yet another cover-up scandal.

Today it is Parliament's job to debate this cover-up by the Prime Minister's own chief of staff. She was informed of specific sexual harassment allegations against General Jonathan Vance three years ago, three years of another victim's voice being silenced. Committee testimony revealed that senior PMO staffer Elder Marques briefed the Prime Minister's chief of staff about an issue related to the former chief of the defence staff and that the military ombudsman and the Canadian Armed Forces had discussions with the Minister of National Defence. Mr. Marques does not work for the Prime Minister or the Liberals anymore, so he was not barred from testifying at committee like every other Liberal staffer has been. His testimony shines a light on how high up these discussions went and how many people knew, but turned a blind eye.

In March 2018, the Privy Council Office was informed of the allegations, but came to an "impasse" and no further action was taken. This did not clear General Vance; rather, it only stalled the investigation. Even so, a pay raise that bureaucrats say the minister was involved in was still given to him in May 2019. Allegations began being publicly reported in 2021.

Five hundred and eighty-one is the number of sexual assaults reported under Operation Honour between April 1, 2016 and March 9, 2021. Two hundred and twenty-one is the number of sexual harassments reported during that same time period. These numbers represent real men and women in uniform and they are just the ones that are known. How many more have not and will not come forward because they see how these allegations are handled, because they see those in the highest positions of authority avoiding their responsibility to protect them, like the Minister of National Defence?

The minister's inaction and evasiveness harm Canada's men and women in uniform. That is perhaps the most disturbing part. Operation Honour is referred to casually in the military as "operation hop on her" and, ironically, in the very worst way, was headed by General Vance. Many members of the military report that if they come forward with sexual assault allegations that are not proven, they are given two options: return to their unit or be honourably discharged. Effectively, they lose their jobs or go back with their abusers. Sadly, this kind of thing is not that unusual in predominantly closed institutions that rely on the discipline of a rigid power hierarchy.

However, it is mind-boggling that the minister failed to take any real action during the past six years since the Deschamps report and recommendations on sexual misconduct and under-reporting in the military in 2015, while simultaneously declaring themselves a feminist government and turning a blind eye to allegations brought directly to him by the military ombudsman. That is six years of failing to act and to proactively address this systemic challenge for the men and women he served with and who served under him. The Minister of National Defence is avoiding his own responsibility and is an active part of this Liberal cover-up. I cannot fathom why he would choose to ignore the evidence brought to him by the ombudsman and to silence voices of victims, but perhaps the fact that General Vance was the minister's superior during his own military service is insightful.

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Regardless, when confronted with difficult situations, strong leaders take responsibility and take action. The ombudsman confirmed that the defence minister was strong in one way, strong in his refusal to see any evidence about the allegations against General Vance and strong in his efforts to keep the ombudsman away from his office after that. He cancelled seven meetings to avoid further discussions. Ombudsman Walbourne testified, "I did tell the minister what the allegation was. I reached into my pocket to show him the evidence I was holding, and he pushed back from the table and said, 'No.'"

When presented with evidence of sexual misconduct, evading and avoiding can never be the reaction. The defence minister failed in his duty and has broken trust with men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces and with all Canadians more than once. It is reported that General Vance believes he is "untouchable". I suggest the minister and all the people at the top have enabled that conclusion.

That seems to be systemic in this particular government. The Prime Minister first claimed his office knew nothing about the allegations, but the evidence shows his most powerful, privileged and likely closest confidante and staff member knew about it. She abdicated her duty and orchestrated a cover-up of the allegations.

● (1710)

She is also complicit in silencing voices of victims and survivors of sexual misconduct, and if she had nothing to hide, I think she would gladly step forward at committee and proactively share the steps the Prime Minister, the defence minister and the government are taking to strengthen the reporting, investigations and consequences for sexual misconduct in the military.

Instead, Liberals are interfering with committee scrutiny and have announced yet another review rather than acting on recommendations from the major report done shortly before they were elected in 2015.

Canadians have heard this song and dance too many times from the Liberal government. It is yet another example of passing the buck, dodging responsibilities and saying one thing and doing another.

The filibustering of witness discussions at the Standing Committee on National Defence clearly imitates the filibustering, delaying and dodging that was a hallmark of the SNC-Lavalin scandal, where the Prime Minister pressured the former attorney general, who is the member for Vancouver Granville, to interfere in an independent prosecution. When she refused and resisted months of relentless pressure, which he also denied, he fired her. It is much like the still-ongoing cover-up of the WE Charity scandal.

As recently as April 27, the Prime Minister said neither the defence minister nor his office knew the complaint against General Vance was one of sexual misconduct, but his own former staffer testified that he himself kept the chief of staff updated about the bureaucratic investigation into the claims and that the bureaucrats were informed the allegation was related to sexual harassment.

The Liberal chair of the defence committee unceremoniously cancelled the meeting to which the Prime Minister's chief of staff

had been invited to clear all of this up. As recently as this past weekend, the defence minister studiously avoided answering directly whether he knew the allegation was sexual in nature. All of this stretches the bounds of believability of the Prime Minister's claim that no one really knew the details.

Of course it all makes sense in the context of hiding something. Canadians know well the lengths to which this particular government will go. With the Liberal government, where there is cover-up there is scandal. There are clearly networks of very powerful people at the very top who must be held accountable. As the Prime Minister once used to say, there is clearly a need for sunlight as the best disinfectant.

Quite obviously, the Liberals ought to actually walk their talk and work immediately to implement recommendations from the report they have sat on since 2015 instead of doing another review, despite the esteem of the former justice now in charge of it, because justice delayed is also justice denied. For victims of sexual harassment and abuse, that is only too true.

Operation HONOUR itself puts a fine point on it, in the Path to Dignity and Respect:

Whether real or perceived, organizational tolerance of sexual misconduct or a pervasive insufficient organizational response to incidents will contribute to a climate where sexual misconduct is ignored, minimized or excused and impacts the willingness of people to report incidents.

It is chilling that the top soldier in charge of Operation HONOUR was the very person who reportedly intimidated and threatened consequences against his target. Major Kellie Brennan said:

It's recorded...him directing me in what to say, what not to say, how to say it, what to exclude, to perjure myself and to lie.

She added:

I definitely feel that there will not be justice for me...if my speaking out can change everything for other women to come forward and change our policies, that's okay with me.

Such a debt of gratitude is owed to her and to all men and women who volunteer to enter into harm's way to protect all of us and serve in the Canadian Armed Forces. The loss of trust in leadership must be staggering and it must be severely damaging. The least that can be done is for the Prime Minister to take the first step in showing that people will be held to account by firing his chief of staff, but it cannot stop there. The defence minister is also complicit and also needs to be held accountable for his actions.

● (1715)

[Translation]

Mr. Luc Desilets (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I have had some difficulty following today's debate at times. I am hearing statements about toxic masculinity that I absolutely disagree with coming from one side of the House, and I am utterly baffled by the level of patience and tolerance demonstrated by the Liberal women on the other side of the House who spoke today about the allegations of sexual misconduct.

Earlier, a senator said the following on social media:

Justice Arbour, whose reputation goes beyond the borders of our country, cannot agree to participate in this cynical travesty in which victims paid the price to protect the image of the Prime Minister and that of his defence minister.

Does my colleague want the Minister of National Defence to resign?

[English]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, I am sure it will not surprise my colleague to know that I have no faith or confidence in this particular Minister of National Defence, and he has frankly earned that lack of trust and loss of confidence, not just on the issue we are talking about today, but on others that I have noted.

I am also glad my colleague raised the issue about toxic masculinity, which my colleague for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke spoke about, and they were asking why she was bringing it up. In the response to her Order Paper question, the Liberal Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence talked about that. The government's reply said:

National Defence understands that a culture change within the Canadian Armed Forces is required, to remove a culture of toxic masculinity and to create an environment where everyone is respected, valued, and can feel safe to contribute to the best of their ability.

I think she quite rightfully and truthfully showed toxic masculinity in the leadership roles of the current Liberal government. What she is saying is not to blame the men and women serving in the military and the culture within the military, but to hold the people whom Canadians elected and trusted to do their jobs, such as the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence, to account.

• (1720)

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, six years ago, former justice Marie Deschamps produced a report. The government has done absolutely nothing since then. It just appointed another justice, Louise Arbour, to analyze the situation again even though we already know the findings in the first report.

Does my colleague think that the new report will contribute new insight that will change decisions and enable the armed forces to do things differently?

[English]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, I do not know the answer to the question of what a new review might find or what a new report might contain. As my colleague pointed out, this work has already been done and recommendations have already been made to take concrete action to address the issue of under-reporting and then a lack of consequences for sexual misconduct. That is the right thing to do for all the men and women who serve in the Canadian

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Armed Forces, and for the women and men who are victims of sexual misconduct.

My real concern, which ought to concern every Canadian, is why the heck have the Liberals not actually taken action based on the recommendations in that report published shortly before they were elected in 2015? How have the Liberals sat on that for the last six years while calling themselves feminists? Evidence has been brought directly to them against the top soldier to which they turned a blind eye, and now they are continuing to perpetuate a cover-up.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech. We were just talking about this yesterday in committee. I do not think that writing report after report will get us anywhere.

Justice Deschamps already gave the government her recommendations. I think my colleague will agree that the government is obviously hiding behind this next report instead of taking action with respect to General Vance.

Does she think the government should be taking action instead? If people need to be fired, so be it, but I think there are other things that can be done. I would like her to comment on that.

[English]

Mrs. Shannon Stubbs: Mr. Speaker, similar to my answer to our colleague previously, I certainly agree with the member that it is high time for action to be taken. There are a couple of things needed. There needs to be immediate transparency and accountability for the subject of the issue that we are talking about, which is why we are calling for the Prime Minister to take action to fire his chief of staff. The Liberals also need to allow everybody else who might have knowledge about this particular issue to testify at committee and be transparent. To the larger issue, I completely agree. I do not know why there has been a delay on acting on the concrete recommendations that were already provided.

I did want to say to this particular colleague that I very much enjoy working with her on the public safety committee. She is an incredible MP. She is extremely gifted and very strong. I know we constantly share our frustration at governments and committees simply creating report after report. We like to see action and we call for action. I certainly know my constituents in Lakeland do too.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will have a big sigh because it is with great exasperation that I rise today to speak to the allegations of sexual misconduct in the Canadian Armed Forces.

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As vice-chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, which studied this important issue, I heard some troubling and disturbing testimonies from survivors. They asked the current government to take action to restore confidence in this institution.

We know that the Prime Minister's chief of staff was informed of a specific allegation of sexual harassment against General Jonathan Vance three years ago. We know that the Prime Minister says that this allegation of sexual harassment was never brought to his attention, but the facts lead us to believe otherwise. We also know that the Prime Minister said that people in a position of authority have a duty to act upon allegations. However, I will repeat what my colleagues have already stated today: the Bloc Québécois will vote against the motion, for the simple reason that it is not up to the House of Commons to manage the Prime Minister's Office.

Making an employee take the blame for the Minister of National Defence's and the Prime Minister's failure to take action would set a dangerous precedent for ministerial responsibilities. The Liberal government knew that there were allegations of sexual misconduct against Mr. Vance, but it deliberately turned a blind eye. Why try to blame an employee who is just following her boss's orders? The Conservatives' motion is puzzling.

I now want to talk about the Conservatives' actions in the past and what we know about what has happened in the last few years under the Liberal government. I will then conclude by talking about some points relating to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

The Conservative Party is in no position to be giving lectures. The current leader of the Conservative Party was informed of the allegations of sexual misconduct against General Vance, but that did not stop the Conservatives from appointing him as chief of defence staff, even though they were all aware.

The Prime Minister, the Minister of National Defence and the current leader of the official opposition are responsible and accountable for the sexual misconduct scandals involving the senior leadership of the Canadian Armed Forces. It is enough to want to simply bury your head in the sand. The Prime Minister did not include implementing Justice Deschamps's report in the mandate letters to the current Minister of National Defence on three occasions, in 2015, 2019 and 2021. In baseball, after three strikes, you are out.

Everyone in his office knew about the allegations against General Vance, but the Prime Minister claims he knew nothing. His own minister did little or nothing—he was wilfully blind—and the Prime Minister never reprimanded him. On the other hand, the Prime Minister was quick to expel two of his MPs before they became ministers, expelling them without hesitation when there were allegations of sexual misconduct against them. Why the double standard?

The Prime Minister claims he knew nothing of the allegations against General Vance, but everyone in his office was aware and so was his minister. If his own minister and his own staffers are hiding such information from him, that is further proof of his incompetence in leading his team and of his flagrant lack of leadership.

The Minister of National Defence did nothing when the former Canadian Armed Forces ombudsman, Gary Walbourne, informed

him of the situation during a private meeting on March 1, 2018. The Minister of National Defence flatly refused to see the evidence against General Vance. What is more, Mr. Walbourne described the meeting as “tense”.

When it came time to testify before the Standing Committee on National Defence, after the story against Mr. Vance came out in the media, the minister categorically refused to answer any questions, and he said he was surprised to learn about the allegations against General Vance in the media. After being accused of not even wanting to look at the file, according to former ombudsman Gary Walbourne, the minister returned to the Standing Committee on National Defence. This time he claimed that he did not learn about the allegations against General Vance because he did not want to interfere, which every witness, except for the Liberals, thought was baseless.

The Minister of National Defence even said that the nature of the allegations against General Vance was not important. This proves yet again that he is not taking the situation seriously. He has been the Minister of National Defence since 2015, but he has yet to implement all the measures in Justice Deschamps's report. One of the key recommendations in this document was to create an external mechanism Canadian Forces members could use to report misconduct.

● (1725)

Justice Deschamps made her recommendations six years ago, but the Liberals have not acted on them. Justice Deschamps commented in committee that she believes not much has been done and that very little has changed. The Liberal government chose to do nothing, just as it chose to do nothing about General Vance. Instead, it announced on Thursday, April 29, 2021, that it had given former Supreme Court Justice Louise Arbour the mandate to conduct an independent and comprehensive review of misconduct in the army.

I will first express my utmost respect for Madame Arbour's sterling reputation. She is renowned around the world. However, that does not at all excuse the government's behaviour or its inaction with respect to General Vance over the past three years.

In 2015, the Conservatives appointed General Vance as the head of the Canadian Armed Forces even though they had already heard the sexual misconduct allegations against him. The current Leader of the Opposition, then the veterans affairs minister, knew that there were sexual misconduct allegations regarding Vance. The military police conducted an investigation of Vance, but it was dropped on July 17, 2015, the day Vance became chief of the defence staff and, therefore, boss of the military police.

The Conservatives did not even wait to get the findings of the investigation, and they did even less due diligence in appointing Vance as head of the Canadian Armed Forces, knowing that the new chief of defence staff would be responsible for implementing Justice Deschamps's recommendations.

I now want to talk about some facts related to this situation. On March 27, 2015, former justice Marie Deschamps released a damning report, finding that there was widespread sexual misconduct within the Canadian Armed Forces and a sexist culture that turned a blind eye to misconduct.

This report had been commissioned in the wake of accusations against Warrant Officer André Gagnon, who sexually assaulted a subordinate, Corporal Stéphanie Raymond, in December 2011. Corporal Raymond filed a complaint against Warrant Officer Gagnon in 2012, but her superiors in the chain of command turned against her and she was eventually dismissed for misconduct in 2013. She spoke about this when she testified before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Warrant Officer Gagnon was acquitted in 2014, but after Raymond successfully appealed that ruling, he finally pleaded guilty in 2021.

It was Corporal Raymond's case and the accusations she made against the Canadian Armed Forces that led to Justice Marie Deschamps' report. When she testified before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, Corporal Raymond confirmed the difficulties she had after she filed her complaint, the intimidation she was subjected to as well as the reprisals against her that pushed her to resign. It was not a trifling matter.

The Deschamps report contained 10 recommendations. The most important one was to make the complaints reporting system independent of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of Defence. When she testified before the Standing Committee on National Defence in February 2021 and before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, Marie Deschamps stated that very little had been done since her report was released in 2015 and that not much had really changed. Only three of the 10 recommendations had been implemented in 2019, which we cannot really say is a good batting average.

Elder Marques, a former adviser to the Prime Minister whose testimony the Liberals tried to block by filibustering, finally appeared before the Standing Committee on National Defence. He confirmed that the Prime Minister's chief of staff, Katie Telford, was aware of the allegations against Vance and that she or one of her assistants had spoken to him about it, without providing details on the nature of the allegations and simply mentioning misconduct.

However, Marques assumed everyone had figured out that it was a sexual misconduct complaint. Two of the Prime Minister's close advisers, and probably more, were aware of it, but Marques said that he did not remember discussing the issue with the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister denies having been made aware of the sexual misconduct allegations against General Vance. He says Gary Walbourne never sent the documents that were requested to his office and that he did not know there were #MeToo allegations. However, he did not clearly deny knowing or that there were allegations of an unknown nature against Vance. He always made it clear that he did not know they were allegations of sexual misconduct, which could be his way out if emails or testimony confirmed what he knew.

The Liberals' defence makes no sense. Anybody who had taken the time to listen to Walbourne would have understood why the vic-

tim did not want to file an official complaint. Vance would have found out about it and could have destroyed her career. What the victim needed at the time was leadership, but the Liberals failed to provide it.

• (1730)

I also want to point out that, in 2019, the defence minister was consulted about a \$50,000 increase to Vance's annual salary, retroactive to April 1, 2018. The Prime Minister allegedly signed off on that pay raise. Why would the Prime Minister authorize a raise for General Vance long after the PMO was made aware of the allegations against the general? That is unacceptable.

On January 14, 2021, General Vance retired. In February 2021, Global News reported on cases of misconduct by Vance, including his relationship with a subordinate and the obscene emails he exchanged with a much younger service woman in 2012.

The woman who was in a relationship with Vance has publicly stated that he threatened her multiple times. General Vance thought he was untouchable. He said that he controlled the Canadian Forces National Investigation Service. I also heard that from the victims who testified before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

The Standing Committee on National Defence chose to once again look into the allegations against Vance, but when the Minister of National Defence was initially called to testify, he said that he had learned about the allegations against Vance from the media, and he systematically refused to answer any questions on the pretext that the case was before the courts.

The testimony of Gary Walbourne, who confirmed that he had informed the Minister of Defence and that the minister had refused to even look at the file, was a huge black eye for the government. Other witnesses told the committee that the minister could have taken action and had several tools that he could have used to call for an investigation into Vance. The Minister of Defence came back to committee in March, and this time he agreed to talk in order to defend his handling of the file. He admitted that he had refused to look at Walbourne's file, but he claimed it was because he did not want to do the investigating himself, even though no one was asking him to.

The Liberals did not hesitate to filibuster in an attempt to prevent Liberal staffers Zita Astravas and Elder Marques from being invited to appear before the committee. I know this because I was filling in for another member of the Standing Committee on National Defence that day. I thought it was truly a sad day for democracy. Thanks to Elder Marques' testimony, we know that everyone around the Prime Minister was aware, but the Liberals continue their denials. When other staffers were summoned by the House, the Liberals chose to send the Minister of Defence instead, saying they would not let their staffers testify.

Again, both parties chose to do nothing. Even though the Conservatives had already heard rumours of allegations against General Vance, they still appointed him chief of the defence staff when the CAF had just been severely criticized for their management of sexual misconduct and the widespread sexist culture.

Business of Supply

In the absence of evidence, the fact remains that there were already many rumours and allegations against General Vance. Why, then, did the Conservatives not appoint someone above reproach to make major reforms in the forces to combat sexual misconduct?

The Liberals chose to ignore the issue. The Minister of Defence flatly refused to meet with the former ombudsman 12 times and would not even look at the evidence, claiming that he did not want to interfere in the investigation. The Prime Minister's entourage knows that he knew there were allegations against General Vance, but even if the Prime Minister did not have all the details, everyone around him suspected that the allegations involved, as I was saying, a case of sexual misconduct. There were emails that mentioned sexual misconduct directly. The minister even said that the nature of the accusations against Vance did not matter and that what matters are the actions.

The Liberals did absolutely nothing on this file. They did not even implement Justice Deschamps' main recommendations, including a complaints process that would be completely independent of the military to receive all sexual misconduct complaints. The facts speak for themselves. There are now four generals with misconduct complaints against them. In short, if the Liberals did nothing, it is not Katie Telford's fault; rather, the entire cabinet is to blame, led by the Minister of Defence and the Prime Minister.

As a final point, one of the things we learned at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women is that officers regularly attempt to interfere after allegations are made and that military prosecutors often end up negotiating inadequate settlements with victims. Many survivors developed a distrust of the military's internal justice system and wished that allegations of sexual crimes were not handled by the Canadian Forces' own police, prosecutors and judges.

The military justice system seems ill-equipped to deal with this type of crime and was not designed to deal with this type of offence. Corporal Raymond finally won her case by going before the civilian courts after several years of hard fighting.

We also noted at committee that, when faced with hundreds of allegations of assault and harassment, General Vance launched Operation Honour in 2015, which promised to ensure that victims of sexual misconduct would feel safe coming forward. However, Operation Honour did not live up to its promises. According to an investigation by *The Fifth Estate*, in the four years following its inception, the military conviction rate for sexual assault was 14%, well below the 42% conviction rate in Canadian civilian courts. Many of the cases in the military courts often ended in inadequate settlements between the prosecution and the defence.

• (1735)

Beyond that, an entire culture must change. The committee also heard from Julie Lalonde, who spoke about the difficulties she experienced when she tried to deliver her training to the cadets at the Royal Military College of Canada in Kingston. When she tried to teach them about harassment issues, the comments she heard were degrading, chauvinist and sexist.

A retired lieutenant-colonel came to testify about the reprisal he experienced when he tried to help an employee who asked him to

report that she was facing harassment and human rights violations by a senior manager.

Several survivors also testified about the lack of acknowledgment of the trauma they had experienced. We now recognize the consequences of post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from overseas missions, but victims of sexual assault and misconduct do not get the same recognition. The consequences are felt not only by the survivors, but by everyone around them.

Speaking of overseas missions, there have been articles showing that in addition to addressing the culture within the Canadian Armed Forces, we must also probe the culture surrounding what happens during foreign missions. It could even be a matter of national security.

According to Ms. Raymond, who testified before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, from what she heard, if cases of assault are happening here, internally, then they must also be happening on overseas missions.

The Standing Committee on the Status of Women had already undertaken a study, but it had to be halted when the 2019 election was called.

In closing, we absolutely need to put an end to the code of silence surrounding the environment of abuse of power and harassment. We need to put an end to the complicit silence within the Canadian Armed Forces. Let us stop looking for scapegoats. Let us complete the studies being carried out by the Standing Committee on National Defence and the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, because we really need to stop discouraging women and those who want to serve in the Canadian Armed Forces. We need to stop putting off taking action by requesting yet another report.

We need practical solutions to help survivors, so let us take action.

• (1740)

[English]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Madam Speaker, near the beginning of her speech, the member mentioned that she has listened to the stories of victims who have come forth to her. What does she need to see and what needs to happen before she can recommend to a young woman, a daughter perhaps, that she enrol in the Canadian Armed Forces? What does she need to know has changed for her to recommend a woman to the Canadian military, with a clear conscience?

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

There are so many changes that need to be made. I spoke about the importance of restoring the confidence of young women who want to enlist in the Canadian Armed Forces. Obviously, what is happening right now with the cases of assault and everything that is being reported in the media is not encouraging these young women to enlist. Their confidence needs to be restored. They need to know that they will have access to an independent body and that their cases will be examined.

I also spoke about supporting survivors and how there is not enough recognition of the post-traumatic stress syndrome experienced by assault victims. It is important to implement the recommendations set out in the Deschamps report because it will restore young women's confidence.

Beyond that, another person testified that there were no rape kits on board a military ship. Obviously, those kits should be provided so that women know that they have a way to report an assault.

[English]

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Madam Speaker, the government is not following through with some of its promises. How deflating is that for real change? If we use symbolism but do not act with specific measures and have consequences, what does that do for other people?

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, the interpretation is not working.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): There is a problem with the interpretation.

[English]

Is interpretation working now?

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, I can hear the interpretation now.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would like the hon. member to ask the question again.

Mr. Brian Masse: Madam Speaker, if we have no significant consequences and just the symbolism the Prime Minister has shown, how deflating is that for real change and for the people affected and traumatized by what has taken place?

[Translation]

Ms. Andr  anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, the member is right. We have to move away from symbolism and implement concrete measures to hold people accountable for their actions.

If the government is truly feminist, it must condemn these actions. People who commit sexual assault must actually get the punishment they deserve. They have to suffer the consequences of their actions, not in a symbolic way, but in a tangible way.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): It being 5:44, 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.

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.

• (1745)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Madam Speaker, we ask for a recorded division.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Pursuant to order made Monday, January 25, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, May 15, at the expiry of the time provided for oral questions.

[English]

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Speaker, I believe, if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:59 in order to start Private Members' Business.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

FEDERAL DENTAL CARE PLAN

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP) moved:

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.

He said: Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today in this virtual House to begin debate on this extremely important motion, which would establish a federal dental care plan for all Canadian families that earn less than \$90,000 a year in family income and do not currently have a dental care plan. This would be an interim measure toward the inclusion of full dental care in Canada's health care system.

I think it is well known that Canadians are very proud of their health care system. Our national universal publicly funded medicare system is a point of national pride. It is a defining element of our society. When we ask people in public opinion polls, they treat it as a national treasure. Indeed, it is a national treasure. It provides equal care. Regardless of social status, income or where in the country people live, they are entitled to care by our health care system without using their credit card to use their health care card.

We have a significant gap in that system because oral health is one of the most unequal aspects of health care in Canada, as most dental care is not covered by any public insurance plan. In fact, those with the highest levels of oral health problems are also those who have the greatest difficulty accessing oral health care due to cost.

Private Members' Business

About 35% of Canadians have no dental care plan at all, and more than 20% of Canadians avoid going to the dentist because of the cost. It puts them in a situation where other aspects of their health becomes affected. Left untreated, poor dental hygiene is linked to many other serious conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, dementia, respiratory infections, diabetes complications, renal disease, premature births and low birth weights. There are a whole series of diseases that are affected by a lack of proper dental care.

The evidence is very clear that dental care and oral health care are part of health care. They ought to be considered not as an add-on to a system but as a part of that system. The situation in the last year and a half due to the pandemic has become even more urgent. We have seen millions of Canadians lose jobs over the last year, and with them they have lost their health care benefits, including dental care. There are, of course, many people who never had any health care or dental care to begin with.

Of our young people, 30% have no access to dental care. These are young adults who are no longer covered by their family plan or who never had a plan in the first place. We are seeing emergency rooms across the country feel the full weight of COVID-19, yet every nine minutes, someone visits an emergency room in Ontario for dental care when who that person really needs to see is a dentist.

Also, a recent study at McGill University showed that those with poor oral hygiene are far more likely to experience more severe systems of COVID-19. Shockingly, patients with gum disease are more than three and a half times more likely to be admitted to intensive care, four and a half times more likely to require a ventilator and, sadly, almost nine times more likely to die from COVID-19 compared to those without oral health and gum disease issues.

The plan we wish to put in place is extremely important because a large number of Canadians would benefit from it. The estimates are that almost seven million people in Canada, who are currently not covered by a dental plan and cannot afford to pay the cost, would be covered. That would include more than half of Canadians who have low incomes, more than half of seniors who are age 60 years and older and 30% of young adults. More than a quarter of the women in our country would benefit from this plan because of the income test.

• (1750)

Children with poor oral health are almost three times more likely to miss school due to dental pain than those with good oral health. Some of the stories I heard, the feedback I received from people when we first started talking about this as New Democrats in our election campaign in 2019, are heartbreaking. The feedback I received is astonishing.

Robin from St. John's East said, "I needed a root canal, which would have cost \$1,500. Since I didn't have dental coverage, I was unable to have this procedure done, which resulted in having the tooth extracted. This has had dire consequences on my mental health. As someone who works with vulnerable populations, I see the pain both physically and mentally they endure because they cannot afford dental care. The government often talks about the importance of mental health, and access to oral health is a major part of this."

Charmaine says, "This is so late in coming, but better late than never. We absolutely do need dental coverage here in Canada. So many people are suffering with pain, humiliation, low self-esteem, depression and poverty. There aren't too many employment options for a person with 'dental illness'."

Jen is a chronically underemployed disabled single mother who says, "I've been forced to choose my child's dental care over my own on many occasions. I've been forced to borrow money and to pay for costly emergency extractions and X-rays. Basic dental procedures should be covered by the government, especially for children. No one should have to suffer dental pain due to poverty in this country."

There were many comments like these heard since the beginning of the discussions about this particular program, a program that is absolutely essential to people's health.

There is an economic cost too for the lack of dental care. According to the Canadian Dental Association, poor dental health and oral diseases not only cause pain and long-term health concerns for individuals but account for over \$1 billion in lost productivity in Canada per year. Almost 40% of Canadians have been taken away from normal activities because of dental complaints. There are 2.3 million school days and 4.2 million work days lost annually due to dental visits or sick days for dental problems. There are also expenses for emergency room visits for people coming in with dental pain when they really need a dentist.

When we talk about dental care being part of health care, many people ask why it is not already covered under the dental care system. There is an astonishing answer to that a lot of people perhaps are not aware of. In 1964, the Royal Commission on Health Services formed the original framework for Canada's public health care system.

In its final report, the commission called for the inclusion of dental services as part of a health care plan, but it noted the shortage of dentists was so acute at the time that it would be impossible to implement a universal system. However, it did suggest at the time it was imperative to establish a public dental care system for children, expectant mothers and public assistance recipients, which could be scaled up as resources expanded. At the time, this was called one of the highest priorities among all its proposals, in addition to regular health care, but unfortunately it was never established.

Today the situation is quite different. We have plenty of dentists, we have orthodontists and other providers in the dental and oral care system, but we still do not have universal dental care. 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 OECD countries, ranking even worse than the United States.

We are proposing a program that would provide dental care with-out premiums for families with family income of \$70,000 or less. For those with incomes from \$70,000 to \$90,000 per year, there would be a sliding co-pay system.

● (1755)

This proposal would be administered by the federal government or by the provinces and territories upon agreement, and the minimum basket of services would comprise annual diagnostic services, including examinations and radiographs; preventive services, which are very important, including scaling, polishing and fluorides; restorations, including fillings and crowns; endodontic services, including root canal treatments; and various other services that would be required, including oral services and extractions; orthodontic services, including non-cosmetic braces; and the various other associated services that are part of this program.

It has been fully costed by the Parliamentary Budget Officer, and this has been available publicly since October 2020. It would cost about a billion and a half dollars per year. This is a lot of money, but when we look at what the government has spent on special programs in the country in the last year, it is certainly affordable. There may be some upfront costs of about \$3 billion because of pent-up demand and untreated diseases that already exist that would have to be looked after, but this is a doable plan.

This is something that can be put in place now. It can be done through the support of Parliament; legislation can make it possible. It is part of what has to be done to deal with a significant lack of equality in this country regarding access to an important part of health care. It is a problem that we can fix and we must fix.

I implore all members of Parliament, each of whom has access to excellent health care 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 and must fix.

I want to pay tribute to my colleague, the member for Vancouver Kingsway, who will be speaking to this motion later on today. He has put forth a similar motion in the House, but mine came first in the draw. I am glad to say that it will be a votable motion if we get to debate it at another time. I want to thank my hon. colleague for his work on this issue and for seconding my motion today.

[Translation]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague. I really admire him, and I am grateful for his work.

I know not everyone is lucky enough to have good dental health or the means to pay for it.

As we all know, health care is the responsibility of the provinces and Quebec. We often talk about that in the House.

Private Members' Business

Does my colleague believe it is up to the provinces and Quebec to take action on this and ensure that all our residents can take care of their dental health?

Last I heard, the provinces and Quebec were asking the federal government to boost health transfers to 35%, which would enable them to implement this kind of program.

● (1800)

[English]

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, as we know, the Canada Health Act covers a lot of health care but not dental and oral care. Health care is administered inside of Quebec under the Canada Health Act, and dental care is not any different from that as a health care matter. We expect that any program of this nature would be similarly administered by a province, and that would be guaranteed along with all other aspects of health care.

I totally agree with the member, by the way, that there has to be a substantial increase in transfers for health care. We should get back to the kind of numbers and percentages we had before.

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for this excellent motion. The Green Party has long supported adding a dental care program to our universal health care system. It is so important that we take care of people's teeth. Why exclude this part of a person's body from health care?

The hon. member outlined a number of savings and benefits to the economy from having a dental program like this. I wonder if he could speak about the health benefits and other implications. When people have problems with their teeth, we know it affects their health in other ways, and I wonder if the member could speak to that issue.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for his support for this motion.

He uses the words "added on", and I am afraid I do not like that. Yes, this is a short-term patch, but it is part of health care and really should be considered as a part of that. The member is right to talk about the health benefits. They are probably more important in many respects, because they have to do with a person's self-esteem. If people have bad teeth, they can have difficulties eating and digesting food, and that leads to other problems. If they put off getting dental treatment, it can get worse and cause other diseases, as I mentioned in my speech.

Private Members' Business

In many cases, it can disfigure people, it causes stigmatization and it has social and employment implications as well. A whole raft of problems are associated with a lack of health care for oral issues, the same as it would have been before we had medicare. People who were sick and could not afford to get treatment did not get treatment. They got worse and they did not have very productive or happy lives. The same thing applies to dental care.

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, as my hon. colleague knows, I moved the same motion forward.

He raised the issue of class. It is not just that there are 12 or 13 million Canadians who do not have dental insurance; it is who those people are. They are primarily indigenous people, women, single parents, young workers, low-income Canadians or seniors.

I wonder if he could spend a moment telling us about the social justice component of this health care measure.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, it is very clear that this is part of a great divide in our country. It is very clear that a large number of people are deprived of proper health care which causes significant problems. They are defined by race, class and the lack of opportunity. Unfortunately, on top of that, it makes life more difficult for them, and it has to be fixed. There is a major social justice component, and I hope everybody sees that when it comes to a vote today.

• (1805)

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to participate in the discussion on dental care for Canadians.

The government remains committed to its promise to work with Parliament to study and analyze this issue. Both the 2019 Speech from the Throne and the 2019 Minister of Health's mandate letter committed to support Parliament in studying and analyzing the possibility of a national dental care program.

Across the country, many Canadians have coverage for dental care through private employee health benefit plans, while many others are supported by government programs. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, \$15.9 billion was spent on dental services in Canada in 2018. Of this, 55% was covered through private insurance plans, 39% was paid out of pocket, and 6% was publicly funded by a variety of federal, provincial and territorial government programs.

We know that three-quarters of Canadians visit a dentist at least once a year, which is higher than the OECD average. Canadian wait times for dental care are amongst the shortest in the world. According to the results of the 2018 Canadian community health survey, over two-thirds of Canadians reported having dental insurance that covered all or part of their expenses. Approximately two out of three Canadians report having no dental needs.

Despite these figures, there is also evidence that many Canadians face cost barriers to accessing care. Approximately one-third of Canadians are uninsured, and 22% of Canadians, roughly 6.8 million people, have avoided visiting a dental professional due to costs. Those with dental insurance are more likely to have visited a dental professional, although 14% of Canadians with dental coverage have still reported avoiding dental care due to costs.

We also know that income is not the only barrier preventing Canadians from accessing dental care. By the time they are adults, 96% of Canadians have been impacted by dental decay. It is largely preventable and disproportionately impacts, and more severely impacts, our most vulnerable populations. Those in rural communities, in particular age groups, such as young adults and seniors, those with disabilities and racialized persons, including indigenous people, face unique barriers accessing dental care.

In 2017, the Auditor General of Canada found that Inuit and first nations persons have nearly twice as much dental disease as the rest of the country. Further, the Canadian Institute for Health Information has found that day surgery rates for early childhood caries, which are generally preventable and treatable, were 8.6 times higher amongst children from neighbourhoods with denser indigenous populations.

We also know that oral health is an integral element of overall health. Poor oral health and inequitable access to dental care is connected with multiple health conditions and challenges, including chronic pain, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease and certain forms of cancer.

The Canadian Cancer Society advises that in overall cancer incidence in Canada, oral cancer ranks ninth in men and 13th in women. The trend line is increasing. Fifty-three hundred Canadians will be diagnosed with oral cancer annually, and nearly 1,500 will die from it.

Though I have spoken to figures that indicate access issues exist, this data is limited, often quite dated and not available equally across the country. We do not have comprehensive data on unmet dental care need at a national level, nor do we have a full understanding of the needs of various subpopulations.

This is why our government has committed to support a parliamentary study on the issue. In addition, to address data gaps, the government has partnered with Statistics Canada to design an oral health component for upcoming cycles of the Canadian health measures survey, funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and in collaboration with leading researchers from all 10 of Canada's university faculties of dentistry and experts from the U.S. and the United Kingdom.

The survey is scheduled to begin next year, although findings would not be available until 2024. Once available, this work would help to update our understanding of dental needs and will provide key information for those developing oral health programs and policies for Canadians.

In addition to improving data on dental care, the federal government continues to provide coverage for dental care services for certain groups of people.

● (1810)

Through the non-insured health benefits program delivered by Indigenous Services Canada, the government provided dental coverage for recognized first nations and Inuit. In the period between 2016 and 2018, over 420,000 clients received dental services through the non-insured health benefits program. In addition to this, the children's oral health initiative provides dental coverage for many first nations children under the age of seven.

The government also offers dental coverage through the employment benefits for federal employees, federal retirees, Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans, and RCMP members and veterans. In addition, it provides limited dental coverage for federal inmates and for some newcomers through the interim federal health program.

Alongside these government programs, all provinces and territories fund and manage their own dental care services. As part of their medicare programs, this covers medically necessary surgical dental services performed by a dentist in a hospital, when a hospital is required for the proper performance of the procedure.

All provinces and territories also provide additional dental coverage at their own discretion, though these programs vary greatly between jurisdictions and are often limited to select groups such as children in low-income households, people receiving social assistance benefits, people with certain disabilities and senior citizens. The specific eligibility requirements, the type of service included and the financial coverage levels vary greatly depending on the province or territory. At the same time, stakeholders have raised concerns about the rising dental costs coupled with stagnant financial limits for the public dental coverage programs, creating a barrier by asking dentists to absorb costs or turn patients away.

Provincial and territorial health care programs, including those with dental coverage, are supported by federal funding through the Canada health transfer, or CHT. The CHT is a key federal funding mechanism for supporting Canada's health care system, providing long-term, predictable funding to provinces and territories. Provinces and territories are free to decide how to allocate those funds in order to best address their individual health care priorities, including dental care and related services. The CHT is providing \$40.1 billion to the provinces and territories this fiscal year. This will continue to increase each year, in line with the growth rate of the economy, with a minimum increase of 3% per year. Over the next five years, this funding to provinces and territories is expected to exceed \$234 billion.

To support the improvement of the oral health of Canadians and fulfill our international responsibility, the government works with partners and stakeholders nationally and globally, including organi-

zations in the professional, regulatory and educational domains, such as the Canadian Dental Association and the Canadian Dental Regulatory Authorities Federation. We also collaborate with international health and dental organizations such as the World Health Organization, the FDI World Dental Federation and oral health authorities around the world.

These initiatives demonstrate that our government is playing a constructive role to support access to dental care for Canadians. We look forward to the outcome of the parliamentary work on this issue.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to this motion. I also acknowledge the contributions of my colleague from Vancouver Kingsway on this issue. I serve admirably with him on the health committee.

As I have said before in debate on similar issues, income and ability to pay should not stop people from having access to needed treatments and care. This is a principle that every Canadian supports. It is something that sets our country apart from others as well, that whole principle of Canadians having reasonable access to the health care they need and deserve. The question becomes how do we deliver that?

We can all agree on the principle and the question then becomes how. This motion suggests one way, and I do have a few questions for my colleagues who are proposing it. I would need a bit more information before I would go to nationalizing dental care as the best way to achieve this outcome. My understanding is that the motion proposes to establish a nationalized dental care plan for individuals who are uninsured and with a household income of less than \$90,000 per year.

While this is laudable, I am not sure the motion recognizes there are already a number of government-funded dental care programs that are specifically catered to help vulnerable groups, such as these persons, gain access to dental care. With regard to what is being proposed, I am wondering what gaps are being discussed and why this is necessary if programs like this already exist.

On the flip side of that, the motion and how it reads to me does not clarify how Canadians who already have a dental care plan through their employment, union, insurance or provincial government would be affected. I have raised this concern in a similar motion around a nationalized pharmacare system. For the purposes of this evening, let us talk about dental care coverage.

Private Members' Business

In my research, in 2018, according to Statistics Canada, approximately 65% of Canadians had access to dental insurance to cover all or part of their expenses. Then existing provincial programs filled in the gaps. The motion does not say how adequate that coverage is and where the gaps are with respect to what is needed to cover those gaps as well as what the additional cost would be to the provinces.

For example, Ontario has a government-funded dental care program that provides free routine dental services to low-income seniors who are age 65 and older, and for children and youth age 17 and under. In Alberta, Albertans can apply at an Alberta Health Services dental clinic for reduced fee dental care for families in financial need. In British Columbia, individuals who receive income or disability assistance are eligible to have basic dental cost coverage. Nova Scotia has the Nova Scotia children's oral health program that covers basic dental care services for children from birth until they are 15, and so on across the country.

At this point, it is incumbent upon me to bring up the element of jurisdiction as is always discussed in the issue of health care and health care programming. As I have just outlined, existing provincially funded dental care programs do exist across the country. I am wondering if a better course of action would be to get the federal government to enter into negotiations with provinces to mandate means-tested dental coverage for seniors and low-income residents who cannot access private dental care plans via their employer or through other means. Is that a better step one? I will try and provide some rationale for that.

To support this argument, the Canadian Dental Association has stated that while it advocates for improving access to oral health care, it believes the best way to achieve this is by improving the funding of existing public programs. I am wondering if creating another bureaucracy or nationalized program would be the best way to target Canadians who are most in need. Perhaps, the best way to understand those gaps and then address them is to enter into negotiations with the provinces in the manner I suggested above.

• (1815)

Health care delivery does have a large jurisdictional responsibility within the provinces, and while I believe federal and provincial governments should work together to address issues like this, we also need to ensure that the potential solution respects jurisdictions and unique regional challenges, which are a part of our confederation.

The other thing I am a little concerned about with the motion is on the cost. Now, I understand that the PBO has done some preliminary analysis, but when I read the 2019 cost estimate of election campaign proposals by the PBO, I saw there is a moderate level of uncertainty with cost estimates. This is due to assumptions about population growth, disease prevalence, utilization rate, inflation and the possibility that the new nationalized plan might cause existing public and private insurers to reduce or even cancel their coverage.

This is something that I think we have a responsibility to discuss, and it is the same principle as pharmacare. What would be the cost or potential risk of using a nationalized program? Would it displace coverage that Canadians already have through private means? I am not clear, from what is in the motion, if safeguards would be built

in to prevent that from happening, or if the member is suggesting a full nationalization of the system and this is the first step towards that.

I raised this issue in the context of pharmacare with an example that I think many Canadians who live in Ontario would know. When Ontario tried to nationalize health care with OHIP+ under the Ontario Liberals, OHIP+ created coverage for 1.2 million Ontarians who did not have it before, but transferred 2.1 million Ontarians who already had private plans to a public plan that did not have the same level of coverage. I am concerned that, without having some prescriptive boundaries around ensuring that displacement of coverage does not happen, jumping to a nationalized model is perhaps not step number one, especially when that is coupled with the issue of jurisdiction.

There are a couple other things that I want to raise as well. Throughout the course of my parliamentary career, I have had many constituents who come in, new Canadians, who were concerned about the issue of credentialling, and one area of credentialling that I hear about over and over particularly is for the dental profession in Canada.

As I am sure everyone who is listening tonight is aware, it is very difficult to have dental credentials recognized in Canada. Of course, we respect professional associations, but I am wondering if we actually have an adequate number of dentists in Canada. Perhaps that is a reason why costs are being driven up. Is it supply and demand issue, and if we had more supply, would this still be an issue?

Listening to the speech from my colleague from the Liberal Party, he talked a lot about access to care in Canada. I am wondering if perhaps there was a bit more information on where the gaps are here, so we might have a better solution moving forward.

I am a Conservative. I think it is my obligation to provide a viewpoint in the House that suggests that maybe we do not always need to leap to more bureaucracy and government in every instance, but I do agree that the goal of providing access to care for dental services for those who are lower income or who might not have coverage is a laudable one.

However, I think that perhaps the better first step, as opposed to just moving towards a new bureaucracy, would be to work collaboratively with the provinces, respecting jurisdiction and looking at a means-tested solution, such as the one I provided, while simultaneously ensuring that there are safeguards in place for those who do have adequate coverage.

• (1820)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Madam Speaker, you might say that no one can be against virtue and apple pie, and you are right, because everyone would love to have a universal dental care plan to rely, and it would be a good idea for the government to look into it.

The problem is that our NDP friends are thinking of either the wrong legislature or the wrong country. Like it or not, the Canadian Constitution is quite clear. Sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution Act, 1867, make it crystal clear that health is an exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces and Quebec. It has nothing to do with the federal government.

As far as health is concerned, the federal government is responsible for the health of indigenous peoples. Incidentally, and we talk about this often in the House, the federal government is absolutely incapable of providing indigenous communities with basic services. It cannot even provide a decent supply of clean drinking water. This is happening in the 21st century in a G7 country, yet my colleagues are claiming that the federal government has what it takes to interfere in an exclusive jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces, namely health.

The federal government is responsible for military hospitals, the approval of drugs and quarantine, as we have seen in this pandemic. That is it.

In 2019, I was elected as the member for Montarville, but in a past life, I sat in the House from 1993 to 2005. During that time, I was always surprised to see our NDP friends constantly proposing things that interfered in the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces. They may not believe it, but they will never get the Bloc's support on these issues because we have the utmost respect for the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces. We are against federal encroachment on these jurisdictions.

Our friends in the NDP should at least go through the motions of acknowledging that their motions deal with a jurisdiction that belongs to Quebec and the provinces. They should at least acknowledge in their motions that certain provinces already have pharmaceutical and dental care initiatives.

For example, my colleague from St. John's East, who moved this motion, should know that Newfoundland provides dental coverage. However, my colleague, for whom I have a lot of respect, does not acknowledge this fact, and it breaks my heart to have to tell the House that I cannot support his initiative.

As long as the New Democrats keep coming up with one motion or bill after another that would have the federal government interfere in a jurisdiction that belongs to Quebec and the provinces, we will be forced to tell them that it will not work. We will never be able to support this kind of initiative. They need to at least try to acknowledge in their centralizing statements that this is not a federal jurisdiction and that the provinces already have such initiatives.

For example, Quebec has had its own dental care program since 1974. Children are covered in Quebec, and social assistance recipi-

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ents have been covered since 1979. There are other programs, such as the one in Newfoundland.

If only our colleagues in the NDP would offer even the slightest acknowledgement that they are making a mistake by proposing health care initiatives and that they are infringing on provincial jurisdictions. Perhaps my colleagues in the NDP, and my colleague from St. John's East in particular, are simply in the wrong legislature. Perhaps my colleague from St. John's East should be in the House of Assembly in St. John's. Perhaps our colleagues in the NDP should be serving in their own respective provincial legislatures, not in the House of Commons, if they want to interfere in jurisdictions that belong to Quebec and the provinces.

• (1825)

Perhaps they are simply not in the right country. The Constitution clearly states that health, among other things, is not a federal jurisdiction. They are either in the wrong legislature, or in the wrong country, or both. They will have to fix that little problem.

Dental care for children has been covered in Quebec for 40 years. Debates about whether to extend or restrict dental coverage and eye care have been held in Quebec. These are healthy debates, and they take place where they are supposed to, in the National Assembly of Quebec or in provincial legislatures. It is not up to the federal government, let alone the NDP, to tell the provinces what they should do in their own jurisdictions. That is what Jean Chrétien's government did, and he did not even try to hide it. He clearly stated that the federal government would set the standards and that the provincial governments would have no choice but to implement them. The federal government wants to turn the provinces into mere service providers for the public. It wants every decision to be made in Ottawa. Too bad, but that is not how Canada's Constitution was designed.

Essentially, the problem is that not only has the federal government continually violated the Constitution, but it has broken its promise. When a health care plan was first agreed upon from coast to coast, the federal government was supposed to pay for 50% of it. Now we are down to about 23%. Quebec and the provinces are covering the difference. It is no wonder that Quebec and the provinces are not in a position to offer dental coverage.

I am addressing my NDP colleagues and my colleagues from other political parties. If the federal government were to respect the consensus of Quebec and the provinces and increase health transfers, Quebec and the provinces might have the flexibility to expand their basket of services to include dental care. The federal government is stubbornly refusing to invest in health care. That is the bottom line. We are told that because we are in a pandemic, this is not the time to discuss health transfers. Somehow, now is the time to discuss a national child care plan, elder care and camping, but it is not the time to discuss health transfers when we are in the middle of a pandemic. There could not be a better time to discuss health transfers.

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However, the deficit announced in the budget is around \$354 billion for fiscal year 2020-21. Curiously enough, that is \$28 billion less than the amount announced in November's economic statement. How can there be a \$28-billion difference when we know that that figure is virtually identical, almost to the penny, to the amount that the provinces and Quebec have been calling for to top up the federal health transfers?

It is almost as if the federal government is giving itself leverage to pressure Quebec and the provinces, so it can ram its initiatives and interference in child care, senior care and whatever else it likes down their throats. The Liberals and the NDP are always in favour of encroaching on areas under the jurisdiction of the provinces and Quebec, but that is not how things should work.

I will therefore respectfully state that the priority is not to create new federal initiatives or new encroachments. The priority is to transfer more money to the provinces. That would give health care professionals some breathing space and enable them to upgrade their equipment and infrastructure so that they can provide the public with better services, including dental care.

• (1830)

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for St. John's East for introducing the motion before us today and for his tireless advocacy in support of universal, public dental care in Canada.

Before I go further, I cannot let the completely incorrect comments of the member for Montarville go unremarked upon. He is absolutely 100% incorrect about the jurisdictional arguments he just made. As a matter of fact, health care has been defined by the Supreme Court of Canada as a shared jurisdiction and there is no mention whatsoever of health care in the Constitution. There is a reference in section 92 to the establishment, maintenance and management of hospitals. There is no question that hospitals fall under provincial jurisdiction, but health care has been ruled to be shared. That is, of course, why we have the Canada Health Act. My hon. colleague spent a long time trying to argue that the federal government cannot establish an expanded basket of services, but of course, the Canada Health Act is exactly what establishes coverage for health care in this country. Lest any Canadian watching this fall under the misapprehension that we cannot create an expanded basket of care to include dental services, the member needs to be corrected on that.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the immeasurable value of Canada's public health care system into stark focus. Over 50 years ago, it was the aspiration and dedication of New Democrat Tommy Douglas and those inspired by him that built our present system, which ensures that every Canadian can access physician and hospital care anywhere in this country as a matter of right. This cherished institution defines us as a nation. It is an affirmation that we will take care of each other at our most vulnerable. It is a reflection of our commitment to equality and justice. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has also served as a tragic reminder that our health care system is not perfect and it is not complete. Many important health services remain uncovered across Canada. For these, patients remain at the mercy of their ability to pay. This is contrary

to Tommy Douglas's dream, which was to build a comprehensive system of health care.

The motion before us today would help address one of the most glaring and illogical gaps in our public system: dental care. Many Canadians may not know that dental care was envisioned to be part of our universal health care system when it was recommended in the 1960s. It was only the shortage of qualified dentists at the time that prevented it from being covered by our present system. This shortage was solved decades ago. By the way, there was no constitutional impediment to including it in the 1960s.

It would constitute an important interim measure toward the inclusion of full dental care in Canada's health care system. Indeed, the omission of dental coverage from our universal health care system is both a pressing public health concern and a social justice issue. There is simply no logical reason whatsoever for excluding oral health from universal coverage. It is as important a part of overall health as care for any other part of our body. Oral health diseases are some of the most prevalent chronic diseases in Canada, yet they are largely preventable.

There are also links between poor oral health and the severity of serious health conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and respiratory infections. In fact, recent research from McGill University has found that those with poor dental hygiene tend to experience more severe COVID-19 symptoms. The most common surgery performed on preschool children at most pediatric hospitals in Canada is for the treatment of dental decay. In seniors, poor oral health is a risk factor for aspiration pneumonia, dehydration and infirmity, yet many retirement home and long-term care facility residents do not receive adequate oral health care due to cost and access issues. It affects pregnant women, leading to low birth weight and premature births.

Numbers cannot quantify the pain, social impacts and economic losses suffered by those with untreated dental problems, often for life. However, some 33% of Canadians, or 12 million Canadians, have no dental insurance and nearly 7 million Canadians avoid the dentist every year because of the cost. The economic impacts of COVID-19 have made things worse. Millions of people have lost their jobs and with them their employment-sponsored benefits. Unsurprisingly, this has hurt low-income and marginalized Canadians the most. Canada's most vulnerable people have the highest rates of dental decay and disease, but the worst access to oral health care services. Indigenous populations have nearly twice as much dental disease as non-indigenous Canadians, and income-related inequalities in oral health are greater in women than in men.

• (1835)

Moreover, at a time when their wages have flatlined and their job prospects grown increasingly insecure, young people have also seen benefits like dental insurance rapidly scaled back or eliminated by employers. As a result, Canadians aged 18 to 34 are the most likely group to report cost as a barrier to dental care.

If we can agree that everyone in Canada should have equal access to health care, regardless of their age, income or job status, then we cannot justify the continued exclusion of oral health care. That is why, during the last election, Canada's New Democrats put forward a plan to provide dental coverage to uninsured Canadians with household incomes below \$90,000 as a first step, a down payment, toward universal public dental care.

In fall 2019, the Parliamentary Budget Officer estimated this program would provide immediate help to 4.3 million people. However, an updated PBO costing analysis conducted at my request and released in October 2020, revealed that the need for this program has grown dramatically. The PBO estimated that 6.5 million Canadians would now benefit from the proposed program.

Under the NDP's plan, there would be no cost for individuals with a household income under \$70,000 and copayments would be required at a sliding scale for those with a household income up to \$90,000. The minimum basket of services covered would comprise a full range of necessary services, from diagnostics to prevention and restorative services. The program would be administered by the federal government, or by provinces and territories, upon agreement, and existing provincial and territorial programs that provide the same services would continue.

At their first meeting following the 2019 election, the leader of the NDP pressed the Prime Minister to work across party lines in this minority Parliament to implement dental care for all Canadians. I was pleased to see the government acknowledge this NDP priority in the 2019 Speech from the Throne. I was heartened to see that the Minister of Health's mandate letter from the Prime Minister contained a specific direction to work with Parliament to study and analyse the possibility of national dental care. Unfortunately the Liberal government has failed to take any action on this commitment to date.

In fact, when New Democrats put forward a motion to fund our dental care plan by adjusting a proposed tax break for those earning \$100,000 a year or more, the Liberals voted it down. When we put forward a plan to fund dental care and other essential programs by taxing the windfalls reaped by pandemic profiteers and the ultra-rich, the Liberals voted it down. Today we have an opportunity once again to move forward on universal public dental care in Canada. Let us not squander this moment.

To those who claim we cannot afford to establish this urgently needed program, I will offer them some perspective. The PBO estimates that ongoing program costs for the NDP's dental care plan would average \$1.5 billion per year. That is not counting the savings that accrue when we keep Canadians out of emergency rooms in this country for dental pain, which is estimated to cost us at least \$150 million per year, without even providing the appropriate care.

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Canada as a whole spends about \$265 billion each year on health care. That means we can cover every Canadian who does not currently have dental care for about half of one per cent. I would also note we could easily pay for this program by cancelling just a fraction of the fossil fuel subsidies we currently provide to big oil companies, if we asked Canadians if they would rather their tax dollars go to essential dental care or to Imperial Oil or Royal Dutch Shell.

Oral health is not a luxury. If we could marshal hundreds of billions of dollars in fiscal firepower to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, surely we can afford to devote a small fraction of those resources to support the long-term oral health of Canadians. Universal public dental care was first recommended in Canada by the "Royal Commission on Health Services, 1961-1964". Canadians have waited long enough. Access to medically necessary dental care should be a right in this country, not a privilege. It is time to roll up our sleeves and begin the work necessary to make this overdue health care service a reality for all Canadians. Our predecessors stood in this place and got medicare established in Canada. It is time we did the same for dental care, so let us stand together and take the first step today. Canadians are counting on us.

• (1840)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands has about a minute and a half to start, and then the rest will go the next time this matter is before the House.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, you and I keep finding ourselves in this position where I am getting half of my time now and afterward I will get the rest. However, I do appreciate the opportunity to at least start talking about such an incredibly important issue.

There is no doubt in my mind that, as indicated by previous members, in particular the member for Vancouver Kingsway, who spoke before me, when our health care system was set up there was an expectation that a pharmacare system and, indeed, a dental care system would follow shortly thereafter. It is long overdue that we get to that point. That is why I was very pleased to see that the Standing Committee on Health recently decided to study the idea of a national dental care program.

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We need to start on this immediately. We need to get moving on it. We need to get to a point where we can put together a system. Like the member for Vancouver Kingsway, who spoke before me, I agree that if we only look at things from the perspective of cost without looking at the savings attached to them, we are doing a serious disservice to the potential of bringing in a dental care program. The same can be said for pharmacare; it is the exact same logic. We just have to get to the point where we have the data to support it and the will politically, collectively as a House, to push forward with the agenda. I have no doubt that in the end we will be a much better country as a result.

I will stop there, but I look forward to continuing when the House resumes the matter.

• (1845)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

IMMIGRATIONS, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, it has been brought to light that Canada's visa application centre in China has been subcontracted to a Chinese state-owned company run and operated by the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau. The company that was awarded the contract, VFS Global, has confirmed at the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration that the Canadian government knew right from the beginning that services were being subcontracted and that it was informed of the ownership structure of the company.

This happened under the watch of the Harper government, and clearly the Conservatives were asleep at the switch. Former immigration minister, Jason Kenney, now the Premier of Alberta, said he did not know about it. I cannot help but ask how on earth he did not know about something as significant as that. It speaks to the level of his incompetence and disregard for the important work conducted by Canada's visa application centres.

The saga does not end there. In 2018, the contract was renewed by the Liberal government, yet no changes were made. In fact, Public Services and Procurement Canada confirmed that it did not even know that services in Canada's visa application centre in China had been subcontracted to a company owned by the Beijing police until The Globe and Mail brought it to their attention in February 2021. The Liberals say they underwent a vigorous process for the contract renewals. However, somehow the Liberal government was still oblivious to the fact that Canada's visa application centre is effectively run and operated by people hired by the Beijing police.

It really shakes one's confidence about the government's vetting process and makes one wonder what sort of security checks are done. Was CSIS even consulted on this? A former CSIS director

was quoted as saying, "I cannot think of a more promising entry point for China's cyberspies." According to Richard Kurland, "The VFS organization may have more personal information on applicants for immigrant services than entire countries do."

It has been reported by The Globe and Mail that 86% of staff are being hired by the company owned by the Beijing police. In what world would having 86% of the staff employed by an arm of the Beijing police be a good idea, when they are receiving the kind of sensitive information that visa application centres handle? Since the subcontractor is a Chinese-owned state firm, according to Chinese regulations the party's secretary must be the chair of the board of the company and the general manager position must be filled by the deputy party committee secretary. This means the subcontractor handling Canada's visa centre services is run and operated by the party secretary and deputy party secretary of the Chinese Communist Party.

I went on Google and was able to find the minutes of the CCP meeting in which it appointed its party secretary and deputy party secretary to these positions. Can anyone imagine that the chair of the company running and operating Canada's visa application centre in China is the party secretary of the CCP branch in that region and the general manager is the deputy party secretary? They have to swear an oath of allegiance to the Chinese Communist Party, and it is their duty to execute the will of the party. That is where their first loyalties lie. If we were prospective applicants, would we feel confident that our personal information for the immigration application is being handled by a company owned by the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau? If the Chinese get wind of the fact that a pro-democracy activist or someone who is sympathetic to the Uighurs in China is trying to get a visa to Canada, do we not think they would be in jeopardy?

• (1850)

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am thankful for the chance to address the question from the hon. member.

[Translation]

I want to start by emphasizing that safeguarding applicants' personal information and privacy is always the top priority for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, and the Government of Canada.

[English]

In fact, IRCC uses visa application centres, or VACs, to provide administrative support and biometric collection services in local languages to visa applicants. VACs do not play a role in the decision-making process and are expressly forbidden to provide any visa-related advice to applicants. All decisions are made by highly trained IRCC officials.

As well, all immigration information gathered at VACs is transmitted directly to Canada and is stored in Canada. This is a one-way process and operates similarly to a client-facing web page. No immigration data is retained at the VACs, and Canadian officials closely monitor the activities of VACs around the world to ensure that privacy standards are met, as per Canadian laws. In addition, the Government of Canada performed its due diligence in vetting the contractor, VFS Global, and has required that all employees in VACs who have access to personal information, including subcontractor employees, are screened to Canadian standards.

[Translation]

I should also note that Public Services and Procurement Canada's contract security program, in partnership with IRCC, commissioned the lead Canadian security agencies to establish the required measures. Their advice was an integral part of the contractor screening process and was used to identify the risk mitigation strategies that should be considered when opening VACs around the world.

[English]

As the hon. member understands very well, there are risks to operating in any foreign environment, and the Government of Canada is well aware of the risks of operating in China. IRCC officials closely monitor the activities at visa application centres to ensure that our stringent privacy standards, as detailed in the contract, are met.

As part of this work, since the beginning of the contract, IRCC has regularly carried out audits and inspections for compliance at all VACs around the world. This includes both scheduled and unannounced audits and site reviews conducted by IRCC officials. Since 2018, IRCC has reviewed and conducted over 20 site visits to VACs in China alone. IRCC video cameras also monitor every time biometrics are submitted.

The contractors must notify Canada immediately of any data breaches at the VACs, as well as any other situations or difficulties that may arise or will have an impact upon the scope of the work, security and protection of personal information included. IRCC is responsible, in consultation with PSPC, for determining whether a reported problem constitutes a privacy breach, and if a privacy breach were to occur, a report would be created to report how the breach occurred, the remedial actions being taken and the mitigation measures proposed by the contractor to prevent reoccurrence. No privacy breaches have been reported to date.

VFS Global has been compliant with its security requirements pursuant to its contract with the Government of Canada. The Government of Canada will continue to improve and implement measures to enhance security requirements, especially in the international context.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Speaker, the government did not even know until recently that the visa application centre operating in Beijing is owned by the Beijing police. The Liberals keep on saying, "Don't worry, be happy". It does not matter that the information never gets into the system or that the information is wiped clean after 30 days on the network. The fact of the matter is that a prospective applicant's situation may be compromised on day one. The minute they walk into that office and hand their file over to

staff, who have been hired by Beijing police, they may be compromised.

In the United States, the handling of the visa application services in China is being done in-house.

My question for the Liberal government is this: Why can Canada not do the same, ensure there is absolute full protection and bring that service back in-house? We should not have a visa application centre in China operated and run by the Communist Chinese Party. We should not be doing that.

● (1855)

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Madam Speaker, I will repeat for the benefit of my hon. colleague that VACs do not play a role in the decision-making process and are expressly forbidden to provide any visa-related advice to applicants.

[English]

In fact, as I stated, all immigration information gathered at VACs is transmitted directly to Canada and is stored in Canada. This is a one-way process, and it operates similar to a client-facing web page. All VAC employees with access to personal information obtain security screenings, and PSPC, in partnership with IRCC, engaged lead Canadian security agencies to inform the measures required.

The Government of Canada is aware of the risks of operating in China and our assessments of China have evolved since VACs were originally contracted. As I stated earlier, we will continue to keep Canadians and their personal information safe. As always, we are looking for ways to improve our already robust system, particularly in the international context.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Madam Speaker, people who have known me for a long time will know that I have always been a big sports fan. Like many people my age who grew up in western Canada, I have many fond memories of Wayne Gretzky and the Edmonton Oilers, and their Stanley Cup dynasty of the 1980s.

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One of the most entertaining parts about sports has to be the post-game interviews, especially with the coach of the losing team. Often the coach of the losing team would say, “You know what, the team had a decent third period, but the team just didn’t show up to play in the first two periods of the game. By the time the team started to play well in the third period, there just wasn’t enough time left on the clock to win the game.”

I see a lot of similarities between those defeated hockey coaches in their post-game interviews and the way the Liberal government has been handling the Enbridge Line 5 pipeline dispute.

On June 27, 2019, the Government of Michigan filed a law suit in state court to have Enbridge Line 5 shut down. That means that for the Liberal government, on June 27, 2019, the puck dropped and the clock on the scoreboard started ticking. Unfortunately, we are not talking today about a hockey game. We are talking about tens of thousands of jobs in both eastern and western Canada.

The Enbridge Line 5 pipeline transports half a million barrels a day of Saskatchewan and Alberta oil to eastern Canada through the state of Michigan. It connects to Sarnia, Ontario, where 6,500 refinery workers depend on this pipeline for their livelihood. The refined petroleum products go on to supply half of Ontario and Quebec’s gasoline, diesel and home heating fuel as well as 100% of the jet fuel for Toronto Pearson International Airport. The jobs of tens of thousands of Canadians depend on the continued operation of this pipeline.

This is an issue that the Prime Minister should have raised directly with President Trump in 2019 or in 2020. After Joe Biden was elected President last November, the Prime Minister should have raised this issue with him, shortly after his inauguration in January.

However, here we are, nearly two years after the Government of Michigan filed its law suit. That is nearly two years after the puck dropped. Where is the Prime Minister in this game? The Prime Minister has not even laced up his skates yet. The Prime Minister has not even gotten onto the ice yet. The Prime Minister has not even done any pre-game warm-ups yet.

Here we are, late in the third period, with just eight days left before the State of Michigan shuts down Enbridge Line 5, and then it is game over for tens of thousands of Canadian jobs.

Fortunately, there is still time left on the clock. There is still the 1977 transit pipeline treaty between our two countries, which prevents a U.S. state from shutting down an international pipeline unilaterally, but this treaty has to be enforced.

Why has the Prime Minister not yet had a direct phone call with President Biden specifically on the issue of enforcing the 1977 transit pipeline treaty between our two countries?

• (1900)

Mr. Marc Serré (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for raising such an important issue.

The Government of Canada certainly shares his concerns about Line 5. It is a vital North American economic artery, as he mentioned, that carries 540,000 barrels day of essential energy products

and brings western Canada petroleum products to refineries in central Canada and the U.S. Midwest.

[Translation]

This is one of the cases that concerns us all, and we need to adopt a team Canada approach in response to the Governor of Michigan’s attempt to close this line.

That consensus is clear in the excellent interim report that the Special Committee on Canada-United States Economic Relationship is currently examining, a report that highlights on the true solidarity between the witnesses and the members of all parties.

[English]

The Governor of Michigan based her opposition on concerns about the safety of a short stretch of the line at the Straits of Mackinac. This is the body of water connecting Lake Huron to Lake Michigan. I have two points. First, Canadians care as deeply as Americans about the integrity of our Great Lakes, full stop.

[Translation]

Second, Line 5 is completely safe for the straits. What is more, Enbridge monitors the pipeline in that area 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and the company wants to do more. As part of its Great Lakes tunnel project, the pipeline would be secured in a concrete tunnel below the lake bed, making the already safe pipeline even safer.

[English]

We are making our message clear in both Michigan and Washington, D.C. The Prime Minister raised our concerns during his virtual summit with President Biden in February. The Minister of Natural Resources is pressing the issue with energy secretary Jennifer Granholm, and so are our diplomats in the U.S. capital and in Michigan.

[Translation]

Our main argument is that the continued operation of Line 5 is in everyone’s best interests on both sides of the border. It is certainly in the best interests of the thousands of people whose jobs depend on it.

[English]

For Michigan, feedstock from this pipeline supplies the state’s refinery. It is the source of more than half of Michigan’s propane, heating thousands of homes and businesses, and also the source of most of the jet fuel used at the Detroit Metro Airport. In fact, a new report from the American Petroleum Institute highlights the critical and growing importance of cross-border energy trade between the two nations, with the conclusion that in the U.S. this trade most benefits six states, four of them in the Midwest region: Illinois, Minnesota, Indiana and Michigan.

We believe this conflict will be resolved. Enbridge and Michigan are currently engaged in court-mandated mediation, and we fully support the parties working toward a constructive resolution.

[Translation]

President Biden and the Prime Minister officially recognized the economic benefits of energy security for our bilateral relationship. They mentioned our highly integrated infrastructure as a key element of our prosperity and shared security. The President and the Prime Minister also agreed to work together to ensure our recovery after the pandemic. That recovery will enable—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. The member's time is up.

The member for Regina—Wascana.

[English]

Mr. Michael Kram: Madam Speaker, when it comes to the Enbridge Line 5 pipeline dispute, I would think that the transit pipeline treaty should have been one of the first plays in the team Canada playbook. This treaty between Canada and the United States was signed in 1977, when Pierre Trudeau was Prime Minister. One of its biggest advocates in the U.S. was a rookie senator from Delaware by the name of Joe Biden, who, of course, is the current President. To stay with our hockey analogy, bringing this treaty and its enforcement to the forefront should have been done in the first period of the game, shortly after the opening faceoff, not left until overtime or the shootout.

When is the Prime Minister going to stand up for international law, stand up for tens of thousands of working Canadians and save Enbridge Line 5?

• (1905)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré: Madam Speaker, I want to emphasize how encouraged we are by the “Team Canada” approach adopted by the Special Committee on the Economic Relationship Between Canada and the United States, by provincial and municipal governments, by Canada's chambers of commerce and by construction unions, as well as by experts in Canada-U.S. relations.

[English]

I also want to cite some comments made at committee by a senior executive of Enbridge, Vern Yu. A disruption, he said, would hurt both economies, triggering “energy shortages” and threatening high-paying jobs in both countries. For what purpose? He asserts that Line 5 is “the most scrutinized” pipeline in North America and he consistently has found that this pipeline is fit for service on the Straits of Mackinac.

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, Bill C-10 is an attack on the freedoms of Canadians. Particularly in its present form, it fundamentally threatens our way of life. Officially, the bill is about changing the Broadcasting Act to bring online streaming services under broadcasting regulations, but it now also seeks to create a framework whereby social media companies and users can be directly regulated by the unelected bureaucrats at the CRTC.

Adjournment Proceedings

Social media platforms today are the primary place where public debate takes place. They are the public space. They are like radio and television, where large companies broadcast artistic content through limited airwaves. They are the place where all kinds of conversations take place between free individuals expressing and critiquing important ideas. Previously public and private conversations now all take place in this online space. Therefore, any regulation of social media is necessarily regulation of speech, of debate and of that public square.

Broadcast regulation is not about combatting hateful content. There already are Criminal Code provisions dealing with this. Certainly there is a case for regularly re-evaluating those provisions, but broadcasting regulation is about shaping content with other objectives in mind, such as seeking representation of what is deemed Canadian content and establishing quotas for representation of certain views or experiences. Applying this approach to social media means that the government would have dramatic capacity to shape the content which is shown and the user experience on social media.

The algorithms that shape this experience are already fairly opaque in terms of what is seen by whom and why. For this reason, Bill C-10 is a particularly dangerous form of state censorship. Normally, censorship is explicit and transparent; people know who and where the censors are. However, in the world envisioned by Bill C-10, the dialogue happening in the public square, what we see and cannot see, is shaped by state-directed algorithms advancing certain kinds of content over others, sometimes without our knowing about it at all.

Whether individual users are treated as broadcasters or not, their content and who sees it would be controlled through state regulation of social media platforms. In a free society, the state must not take it upon itself to control the flow of information in the public square, but Bill C-10 would create control by default.

At one time, being Liberal meant adhering to the values of freedom, believing that the free exchange of ideas leads to ideas being measured and conclusions being drawn that best harness the wisdom and experience of the wider community. However, today we are seeing increasing efforts to create fear about the implications of free and open discussion. We are warned about misinformation and fake news, about the dangers of populism and public confusion and about the need to trust authority. Some are using these warnings to push us toward an illiberal reality whereby growing state control is justified and powerful people are less likely to be held accountable.

Adjournment Proceedings

Let us not shy away from the fact that in a free society, people are going to say stupid and false things on the Internet. When that happens, there is no need to engage in hyperbolic moral panic. Just tell them they are wrong and tell them why. Truly liberal people do not freak out about the fact that other people do not believe things that are true. Totalitarian control of the flow of information, even in pursuit of truth, inevitably leads to the suppression of contrary opinions which, in the long run, could turn out to have merit. Free societies allow competition between different ideas to be lived out and allow people to come to conclusions based on what they observe.

There used to be so much optimism about the online community's capacity to usher in a small-l liberal golden age of free and equal debate and competition no longer dominated by powerful industrial actors or governments. However, now, perversely, politicians who call themselves Liberal are pushing a return to reactionary state control of the flow of information and creating regulations that advantage strong incumbent players.

In the midst of this situation, I am proposing amendments which seek to protect free societies from foreign-state-backed interference. When foreign states control our airwaves and shut out contrary voices, that undermines the free exchange of ideas that Canadians want to see.

When I asked about this proposed amendment around foreign content, the government claimed that it did not have a position because it wanted to let the committee do its work independently. However, now we can see clearly from government communications that the Liberal MPs are being directed by the PMO. Would it not be ironic if, while seeking to censor the speech of Canadians, the government failed to act in response to the efforts of foreign states to control our airwaves. The government must fix Bill C-10 or withdraw it.

• (1910)

Ms. Julie Dabrusin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am happy to respond to the question raised by my colleague, the hon. member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

The proposed modernized Broadcasting Act is about fairness, a value that is essential in any healthy democracy. We believe that Canadian broadcasters deserve a fair shot at competing against streaming services. Everybody who benefits from the system should contribute to it, therefore, a modernized Broadcasting Act would require streaming services to support the creation and discovery of Canadian music and stories, creators and producers.

[Translation]

A fair broadcasting system can not only keep citizens informed, but also amplify the voices of marginalized people. Over 70 years ago, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Thanks to the declaration's legacy and that of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the government is acting on its commitment to protect and defend human rights by preventing gender-based violence, fighting racism and eliminating all forms of discrimination.

Bill C-10 would ensure a more faithful representation of the diversity of Canadian society by creating a broadcasting system whose programming and employment opportunities are more inclusive. A system that serves the needs of all Canadians is, by definition, a more democratic system.

Bill C-10 would also set the stage for a broadcasting system that serves the interests of francophones and anglophones, indigenous peoples, Canadians from racialized communities, and Canadians of diverse ethnocultural backgrounds, socio-economic statuses, abilities and disabilities, sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and ages.

[English]

Along these same lines, the bill would provide the CRTC with new, flexible regulatory tools intended to encourage the development of diverse Canadian expression by, for example, incentivizing diversity in key creative positions, or by supporting programs and creators from diverse communities.

As we continue to move through clause by clause, it is through looking at these aforementioned values that we shall continue to examine and debate all motions presented before the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, what an incredible answer that was from the government. Its members talk about human rights with no reference to the core human rights question of freedom of speech and freedom of expression. That is what this discussion is about. It is about the freedom of people of diverse backgrounds, of different racial, ethnic and religious groups and sexual orientations to express themselves online and curate their own content without the government making decisions.

When we have this sort of bureaucratic, top-down effort to promote diversity, it is code for the government deciding what is going to be in our news feeds based on criteria that it establishes through unelected bureaucrats. It is giving them this mandate to control what is in our news feeds on the basis of diversity.

How about having the government focus on giving all Canadians of all backgrounds the freedom to control their own content? Get the CRTC out of the social media content business and respect the human rights that are recognized in the charter, UN documents and elsewhere on fundamental principles of freedom of speech.

Ms. Julie Dabrusin: Madam Speaker, I would like to correct the member opposite on a fact. This is not about political censorship. It simply is not. This is about modernizing the Broadcasting Act, quite simply, and that was not a correct interpretation of what is being done at all.

Adjournment Proceedings

However, we are guided in our values by the Charter of Rights and are going through an intersectional lens as we are committed to evidence-based decision-making in order to address systemic inequalities, whether systemic racism, unconscious bias, gender-based discrimination, barriers for persons with disabilities, discrimination against LGBTQ2 communities or inequities faced by all vulnerable populations.

I am happy to stress and support our government's commitment to building a stronger and more resilient country for everyone.

• (1915)

[*Translation*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The motion that the House do now adjourn is deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:15 p.m.)

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