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Speaker: The Honourable Greg Fergus



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, May 23, 2024

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)
[English]

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES (A), 2024-25

A message from Her Excellency the Governor General transmitting supplementary estimates (A) for the financial year ending March 31, 2025, was presented by the President of the Treasury Board and read by the Speaker to the House.

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the supplementary estimates (A), 2024-25.

* * *

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8)(a), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 78 petitions. These returns will be tabled in an electronic format.

* * *

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP ACT

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-71, An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (2024).

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

* * *

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 11th report of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, entitled “Main Estimates 2024-25: Vote 1 under Office

of the Commissioner of Lobbying, Vote 1 under Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, Vote 1 under Office of the Senate Ethics Officer, Votes 1 and 5 under Offices of the Information and Privacy Commissioners of Canada.”

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 18th report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, entitled “A Call to Action: How Government and Industry Can Fight Back Against Food Price Volatility.”

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

I would like to thank all those involved in helping prepare the study and the report for Parliament.

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party has a supplementary report attached to this study. I believe it is disingenuous for the study not to include the direct impact that some policy from the Liberal-NDP government is having on price inflation, such as the quadrupling of the carbon tax and the P2 plastics ban, which will increase the cost of food by 54%.

Therefore, we particularly see this impact with food. In addition, impending policies such as front-of-pack labelling will also increase the price of food. We know that 25% of young people are relying on food banks and that others are dumpster diving for their dinner.

I think it is very important that we include every aspect and every impact of food inflation, including bad policy from the Liberal-NDP government, which is included in the dissenting report by the Conservative Party.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Ken McDonald (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 14th report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, in relation to a motion adopted on May 2 on the closing of the 2024 elver fishing season.

I would like to give a huge thanks to all members, staff, the clerk, the analyst and everybody who played a part in enabling the committee to finish this report.

*Routine Proceedings***PETITIONS**

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is always an honour to present a petition on behalf of constituents.

I rise for the 37th time on behalf of the people of Swan River, Manitoba, to present a petition on the rising rate of crime. The community of Swan River is demanding their voices be heard. They are living with the crime and chaos caused by the Liberal government's soft-on-crime laws, such as Bill C-5, which allows criminals to serve their sentences from home. In fact, the Manitoba West district RCMP reported that, in 18 months, just 15 individuals racked up over 200 charges.

The people of Swan River are calling for jail, not bail, for repeat violent offenders. They demand that the Liberal government repeal its soft-on-crime policies, which directly threaten their livelihoods and communities.

I support the good people of Swan River.

• (1010)

CARBON PRICING

Mrs. Cathay Wagantall (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a petition today from 114 individuals who want the House of Commons to consider the following.

After eight years, it is clear that the Prime Minister is not worth the cost, crime or corruption. The Prime Minister and the NDP-Liberal government fail to take responsibility for their failures, which have increased the cost of everything. Crime, chaos, drugs and disorder are filling our streets because of their failed policies.

Therefore, the undersigned citizens and residents of Canada call upon the Government of Canada to axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime. They ask that it hold a televised carbon tax conference, in which they would immediately voice their non-confidence in the failed NDP-Liberal government, and to bring about a carbon tax election so that Canadians would be able to vote to end the carbon tax everywhere and for good.

DECriminalization of DRUGS

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Government of Canada granted an exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to decriminalize the personal possession of illicit drugs in the province of British Columbia for three years. After one year of decriminalization, B.C. has experienced a record-breaking 2,511 unregulated drug deaths, which is higher than all other causes of death combined.

Under this exemption, the federal government enabled B.C. to prescribe fentanyl to minors without requiring parental consent. There continues to be no evidence that decriminalization and the supply of taxpayer-funded hard drugs to those suffering with addiction is reducing overdose deaths.

Therefore, the undersigned citizens and permanent residents of Canada call upon the federal government to reverse its exemption under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, cease the illicit

drug decriminalization and, instead, focus taxpayer funding on increasing availability of timely and effective treatment.

FIRST RESPONDERS TAX CREDIT

Mr. Ted Falk (Provencher, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition from my constituents from the communities of Emerson-Franklin and Springfield, as well as the towns of Niverville and Kleeefeld.

The petitioners want to highlight to the House that volunteer firefighters account for 71% of Canada's total firefighting essential first responders. In addition, approximately 8,000 essential search and rescue volunteers respond to thousands of incidents every year.

The tax code currently allows for a tax deduction of \$3,000, which enables them to get about a \$450-per-year benefit. The petitioners are asking for that \$3,000 amount to be increased to \$10,000, which would increase the benefit they realize from their volunteer services.

These volunteers represent a huge tax savings to our municipality, as well as providing essential first-responding services to incidents of accidents and fires. Therefore, the petitioners are asking the House to support Bill C-310.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind members.

[*Translation*]

There are members who are presenting petitions, and there is a lot of talking going on at the other end of the House, so I would ask people to keep their voices down.

The hon. member for London West.

[*English*]

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to present petition E-4748, which was initiated by a very passionate advocate in my community, Brendon Samuels.

The petition calls on the government to urgently take action on the need for native tree stock to fulfill Canada's tree-planting pledge by 2030 to combat climate change.

The petition highlights the shortages, rising costs and challenges in tree supply chains that are due to various factors, including wild-fires, while advocating for reforestation methods that mitigate future fires and prioritize biodiversity and indigenous-led practices.

The petition also emphasizes the importance of wild birds in seed dispersal and the ecosystem services that are threatened by pesticides and building collisions.

I also just want to take this opportunity to thank Brendon Samuels from London West for his hard work in making sure that many people across Canada were engaged in this petition. I am happy to put this on the floor.

• (1015)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is a great honour to rise today on behalf of many constituents, with a petition directed to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard and to the Parliament assembled.

The concern of the petitioners is the very perilous state of the southern resident killer whale population. These killer whales are an endangered population under Canada's Species at Risk Act. Their legally protected critical habitat is located in an area about to be increasingly trafficked with Aframax tankers loaded with dilbit, as a result of the Trans Mountain pipeline, which, lamentably, all Canadians own.

The underwater noise and physical disturbance from vessels will affect the ability of the southern resident killer whales to communicate with each other and to survive, feed and reproduce. They could lose more than 50% of their echolocation range when commercial shipping traffic is near.

There is a lot more to the petition, but I will summarize to say that the petitioners want Canada to protect our whales as much as Washington state protects theirs. In Washington state, there is a mandatory vessel distance regulation. Recreational vessels and commercial whale-watch vessels must not be closer to southern resident killer whales than 1,000 metres. That should be the standard.

The petitioners tell the House and the government that should be the standard in Canada as much as it is in Washington state.

HOUSING

Mr. Mike Morrice (Kitchener Centre, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise to present another petition on behalf of constituents who are calling out the housing crisis that we are in.

The petitioners note that housing unaffordability and homelessness are twin national crises. They go on to note that the financialization of housing inflates Canadian real estate prices. Specifically, they call out corporations, numbered companies and real estate investment trusts that are rapidly buying up affordable housing and flipping them to market rate units.

The petitioners call for eight actions that the Government of Canada could take to help address the housing crisis we are in. I will summarize a number of them.

First of all, the petitioners call for redefining the formula, the definition of affordable housing. Second, they call for a creation of regulations to control excess profiteering by corporate investors and real estate investment trusts. Third, they call for a prioritization of funding to non-profits and co-operative housing.

Those are just three of eight calls to action specifically in this petition that the petitioners call on the Government of Canada to take action on.

Business of Supply

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. There seems to be a debate in the House. People are not respecting the will and the direction of the Chair. I just want to remind members that they had an opportunity to present their petitions, and I would ask them to please respect others while they are presenting their petitions.

I have a point of order from the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, forgive me, but it was distressing to hear heckling. Petitions are not the voices of the members here, as a member of the House of Commons representing a riding. Presenting a petition is presenting the voices of our constituents to this place. We are neither for nor against the petitions we present. We are speaking for our constituents and, in particular, it is offensive that they should be heckled.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, I would just point out on this point of order that the Chair has made many rulings on this situation. In fact, the member opposite has taken varying positions on this ruling. Therefore, generally, we all know how to present a petition and it is the right of some members in the House, when they see those rules being broken, to bring that to your attention, which is what I believe happened in this situation.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Based on what I had been hearing, it appeared that the hon. member was speaking to the petition, and it is very difficult for individuals to speak to whether the content is in the petition or not. Therefore, I want to remind members to please speak to what is in the petition. I will end it there.

I have already indicated that when individuals are rising to speak to a petition, everyone should be afforded the respect of the House to hear what is being said, as opposed to trying to interrupt individuals during their petitions.

* * *

• (1020)

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FEDERAL INTRUSIONS IN THE EXCLUSIVE JURISDICTIONS OF QUEBEC AND THE PROVINCES

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

That the House:

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(a) condemn the federal government's repeated intrusion into the exclusive jurisdictions of Quebec, the provinces and the territories;

(b) remind the Prime Minister that, despite his claims, it is not true that "people do not care which level of government is responsible for what"; and

(c) demand that the government systematically offer Quebec, the provinces and territories the right to opt out unconditionally with full compensation whenever the federal government interferes in their jurisdictions.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Salaberry—Suroît on a point of order.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Madam Speaker, I would like to indicate to the Chair that, pursuant to Standing Order 43(2)(a), all of the Bloc Québécois's speaking slots for today's debate on the business of supply will be divided in two.

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

We will begin debate. The hon. member for Beloeil—Chambly.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Madam Speaker, over the past few years, the Government of Canada has developed a way of doing politics that follows a clear and heavy-handed approach, including an egregious abuse of the so-called fiscal imbalance. This means that the federal government is receiving more revenue than it needs to fulfill its roles and responsibilities, whereas Quebec and the provinces are collecting and receiving less than they need to fulfill their respective roles and responsibilities.

The government is taking that money and using its constitutional spending power to intrude into areas under the exclusive jurisdiction of Quebec, the provinces and the territories, as set out in the Constitution. What is emerging more and more is the government's persistent, clear and ideological push to centralize powers, in the sense of the responsibilities specific to a level of government. I certainly do not mean powers in the sense of ability or the faculty to do something. These powers are being centralized in the federal Parliament.

When we take a close look, it is pretty clear this is a failure. It is one failure after another. I would like to take this opportunity to say that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Jonquière. I could list a whole series of the federal government's failures when it comes to interference, but I could go on for days, so I will just name a few.

I will use a recent example, namely the government's desire to intrude in the area of dental insurance. At first glance, this seems ideological. Then they decide to hand it over to the private sector, with the support of the NDP. Now it seems no one can make heads or tails of it. It is a failure in the making. It is clearly the result of their refusal, for many years, to make the health transfers that Quebec, the provinces and the territories are unanimously calling for.

In this context, the federal government claims to be working hand in hand with Quebec and the provinces. However, no serious person with a third-grade education still thinks that this is not some kind of a never-ending conflict with the provinces.

There are the conditions imposed by Ottawa on municipal infrastructure. There are the conditions imposed by Ottawa on social housing. There is the colossal failure of immigration: Ottawa is incapable of handling visas, there is a years-long backlog of case files, and the Minister of Immigration has lost track of hundreds of

thousands of people currently on Canadian soil. There is the subcontracting of immigration policy to a highly questionable company such as McKinsey, an ideological aberration that ultimately weakens Quebec. The federal government has failed across the board.

There was much talk about language over the last few days. The vulgar language we have heard is essentially a panic reaction. It betrays a lack of an intelligent response, because there cannot be an intelligent response to what we have seen. We cannot invite people to appear in committee only to treat them in a way that would shame a schoolyard bully.

However, the numbers speak for themselves when it comes to the situation of the French language, both in Quebec and across Canada. The Liberal government does not care all that much about the decline of French, but it sure cares when someone points it out. This is the same government that intends to support a Supreme Court challenge of Bill 96, which seeks to strengthen the French language in Quebec.

I am talking about setbacks, failures and intrusions galore. I am talking about a lack of respect.

Of course, I could talk about secularism, but I will merely say that a secular state would never conceive of imposing Islamic mortgages on a level of government such as the Quebec government, which endorses state secularism. Quebec would not hesitate to eliminate the religious exemption that allows the worst hate speech to spread under the guise of religion.

I repeat, these are failures. In fact, the only good thing the Liberal government ever did with respect to language and secularism was convincing the Conservative Party to basically share its views, views that are extremely unpopular among Quebecers.

● (1025)

The Phoenix pay service, a terrible failure, will now be replaced. This will not get us our money back. There is also the ArriveCAN failure. The repercussions, the spin-offs, if you will, have now reached the billion-dollar mark. This money has come out of the pockets of the Canadian state. It is one failure after another.

Consider the tens of thousands of businesses that were abandoned after receiving assistance from government programs during the pandemic. Given the labour shortages, inflation and interest rates, those businesses faced a highly complex situation. Many of them—we will never know the exact or the real number—had to declare bankruptcy and close down because of this government's ineptitude. This is another failure.

One failure on the international stage, which again is repeated and ongoing, relates to a lack of credibility. It is the inability to have a plan to reach the 2% investment target. It is the position on the war in Gaza and the inability to take the normal and increasingly internationally recognized step of recognizing the Palestinian state. Once again, it is a series of failures.

Bombardier, for example, is missing out on \$5 billion in spin-offs. Meanwhile, Boeing will award contracts worth \$400 million with the co-operation of the governments of Quebec and Canada. I doubt whether we will ever find out the real reasons behind that whole mess. It is one failure after another.

The government is incapable of doing its own work properly, yet it wants to do the work of others in their own areas of jurisdiction. The people have given it a mandate, but it is a minority mandate. This minority government, as I said, is a failure. Interference always takes longer, always costs more and never improves things. It is done at the cost of a series of subcontracts, whether we are talking about McKinsey, ArriveCAN or others of the kind. It is done at the cost of 109,000 more civil servants. That is on top of the subcontracts and the increasing duplications in Quebec and provincial jurisdictions. There is also the \$40-billion deficit, which is no small matter.

To govern as a majority, purely for the sake of power, the government joined forces with the NDP. Rather than receiving its mandate from the people, the government receives its mandate from the NDP. It is a fool's bargain. If the NDP does not act soon, it will bring about its own demise. The government has two choices then. It can hold off on its aggressive centralization agenda, its abuse of the fiscal imbalance and abuse of spending power until the end of its mandate, which would normally run until late 2025, or it can call an election now to try to obtain that type of mandate, which I strongly doubt that Quebec will consider. It has no right to dupe Canadians or the parties in the House. As I said before, if the Prime Minister is so interested in the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces, he can go off and pursue a career in provincial politics, preferably in Ontario.

At the very least, however, what the government must do is acknowledge in every one of its actions the right to opt out with full compensation, with no conditions for Quebec and the provinces. At least its centralizing ideology could then be properly circumvented in a way that respects the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. The main goal—and this is the spirit of this motion—is for the Canadian government to put an end to its increasingly numerous and increasingly crude and misguided abuses that fail to respect the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces. If the government does not do so, since it will have fun raising the issue in the next election, it will see how useful the Bloc Québécois really is.

• (1030)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to think that members of Parliament would put the people they represent first and foremost with respect to their interests. Whether it is the dental program, or the school food program that is providing nutrition to children or the national child

Business of Supply

care program, these are all programs that the Government of Canada, working with stakeholders and other levels of government, has moved forward with and that are being received well in all regions of the country.

Does the member not believe that the Government of Canada should be reflecting on the expectations of people in all regions of the country, which include the types of investments we are making today?

[Translation]

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, in a way, the answer is in the question.

I would like Quebeckers to hear someone stand up in Parliament and tell them, in English, to look at what the rest of Canada is doing better than they are, and to tell them that they are so bad that the federal government needs to develop programs that will be imposed on them with their own money. I think it is completely ridiculous to say that a Canadian is intrinsically superior to a Quebecker.

If good ideas are implemented in one place, they can be implemented in other places. Take, for example, child care services, whose model originated in Quebec, or pharmacare, whose model originated in Quebec. If the Canadian government feels entitled to copy what Quebec is doing right, I hope it will at least acknowledge that this is because Quebec is capable of doing it.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Beauce—Chambly, the leader of the Bloc Québécois.

There are many things that divide us. There is no denying that, to be sure. However, there are some things that unite us. I think the hon. member will acknowledge that we, Conservatives, respect jurisdictions. That is a cornerstone of our political action. In fact, when we were in power, our government minded its own business, dealing with federal matters and letting the provinces make their own decisions. The result spoke for itself: The sovereigntist option lost support in the polls.

Conversely, as the leader of the Bloc Québécois demonstrated, what we have seen for the past nine years is a federal government that does not take care of its own business properly. Not only does it not look after its own affairs properly, but it also interferes in provincial jurisdictions. What are we seeing as a result? The independence movement is on the rise in Quebec. While that may be music to the ears of the leader of the Bloc Québécois, it is not necessarily a good thing. Two weeks ago in the National Assembly, the leader of the Parti Québécois cited the Liberal government's mismanagement of Canadian funds to justify independence.

My question is very simple: Why, then, did the Bloc Québécois vote for \$500 billion in budgetary appropriations?

• (1035)

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, this is a wonderful opportunity. However, there are a number of factors.

First, I acknowledge the Conservatives' new position of wanting to give unconditional health transfers, or transfers of any kind, to Quebec and the provinces.

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I have a second piece of good news. We will hold the debate on independence. Indeed, the tide is turning, we are coming up on the third referendum and we will win it. There will be room for everyone in Quebec to continue in politics, including the members of Parliament.

There is a third thing. Let us get something straight in this slogan-driven demagoguery. The Bloc Québécois has voted against every Liberal budget and every Liberal economic update. That said, the failure to vote in favour of appropriations in a number of cases amounts to replicating, as the Conservatives know all too well, the American model of government paralysis designed to prevent the state from functioning. The departments in question would be unable to issue paycheques. This is the simple explanation. We voted against the budgets and the updates, but the Conservatives can go ahead and keep repeating in French that the Bloc Québécois did this and in English that the NDP did something else.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the leader of the Bloc Québécois for his speech and his motion on things that matter to us as New Democrats, such as public services and health services, or pharmacare, which will require negotiation with the provinces, since the Quebec system is not perfect. All the unions in Quebec have unanimously called for public universal pharmacare. We could take a step forward together by engaging in discussions.

With respect to dental care, there is no interference, because the federal government does not tell Quebec how to manage its health care system; it pays dentists' bills directly. This will benefit four million Quebecers who do not have dental insurance. Thousands of seniors have already received this care. It would be a shame if the Bloc Québécois opposed care for Quebec's seniors.

Mr. Yves-François Blanchet: Madam Speaker, I think it is wonderful to see the NDP recommending and hoping that the Canadian government will outsource public programs to the private sector, which will make a profit from the public program.

I will repeat the fundamental principle to the unions, the NDP and the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie: There is nothing that a Canadian can do that a Quebecker cannot do, except perhaps extracting oil. Therefore, I invite everyone to commit to improving services in Quebec. We must invest in services in Quebec. The government does not need to negotiate with Quebec. It is supposed to transfer money unconditionally. That is what is missing.

Mr. Mario Simard (Jonquière, BQ): Madam Speaker, what an inspiring speech. It is a tough act to follow. To illustrate just how much the federal government has interfered in the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces, I want to revisit what happened this week during question period.

This week, I asked the Minister of Transport a question, and I was basically saying that Quebeckers want to be masters in their own house, whereas the feds want to be masters everywhere. We see that with pharmacare, dental insurance and all kinds of jurisdictional encroachments.

In response, the Minister of Transport said that the Bloc Québécois was looking for a fight. He is always saying that. Not only does he say that, but he also says that the Bloc members used to be here for their passion and that today they are here for their

pension. Such rhetoric is tired and stupid. I do not think the Bloc members are the only ones getting a pension. Reducing us to that is very rude.

I bring it up because I was initially going to use my speech to respond to the Minister of Transport. However, I think doing so would be mean-spirited and show that I was stooping to his level. I prefer to show the Minister of Transport what we are passionate about in this place: defending the interests of Quebec.

If we are to discuss jurisdictional interference, we must review the definition of what Canadian federalism is. We need to distinguish between two things. On the one hand, there is a unitary state, which holds all the powers. Anyone who has taken politics 101 knows this. On the other hand, there is federalism, which assumes the autonomy of the central government, meaning the federal government, but above all the autonomy of the federated states, in this case the provinces and Quebec. Any student who has taken law or political science knows that this means that, within their own jurisdictions, the provinces are autonomous. In consequence, in the Canadian context, this means that the Quebec state is autonomous.

It is obvious to my party that Quebec is capable of making its own decisions and implementing its own economic, social and cultural approaches to ensure that it continues to survive and thrive. Even Quebec federalists recognize this fact. That is why the vast majority of politicians in the National Assembly identify as autonomists, if not sovereigntists. That is the reality of Quebec politics. The Parti Québécois, the Coalition Avenir Québec and Québec Solidaire are all parties that want the Quebec nation to have more powers in order to secure its future. I do not mean to offend, but even the Liberal Party of Quebec supports the idea of more powers for Quebec, albeit in a different, somewhat half-hearted way. The evidence is clear. Many of the Quebec National Assembly's motions are supported by the Bloc Québécois. Every time the federal government tries to intrude on Quebec's jurisdictions, a motion is unanimously adopted by the National Assembly.

We could make this case just by looking at Quebec's history. There is no denying that every Quebec government has been determined to defend its autonomy. From Duplessis to Bourassa and even Legault, as well as Marois, Parizeau and Lévesque, successive Quebec governments have all sought to expand Quebec's powers. We saw this in rounds of constitutional negotiations, which were carried out to our detriment. We have also seen this in administrative agreements. Quebec is the only province with immigration powers. Quebec is the only province with specific agreements on workforce training.

Quebec society as a whole agrees on the need to defend Quebec's autonomy. Perhaps it was Benoît Pelletier who said it best. Let me quote him briefly:

... the history and current state of our federalism eloquently illustrate Quebec's profound attachment to its autonomy within the federal system. This is easily explained. The minority status of the Quebec people within Canada as a whole confers special value on Quebec's sphere of autonomy arising from the division of powers.

Benoît Pelletier is a federalist. However, he is a bit more informed than some others. He acknowledges that autonomy is a matter of survival for a minority nation. Quebec is a minority nation within Canada. Defending its autonomy is a matter of survival. This explains why other provinces easily accept the federal government's interference in their jurisdictions.

• (1040)

This brings me to a question that I think is central. I have been asking myself this question since I arrived in the House in 2019. Why are the Bloc Québécois members the only ones speaking out against the predatory federalism—I am choosing my words carefully—that is weakening the Quebec nation? Why do my Quebec colleagues in the Conservative Party and my Quebec colleagues in the Liberal Party and the NDP never condemn this system?

The answer is quite simple. It is because predatory federalism suits them. It is because, in a way, they live off it, politically speaking. What the Liberal Party and the NDP are trying to do now is use this predatory federalism to climb out of the basement of unpopularity. That is what they did with pharmacare and dental care. They are trying to use social issues that are outside the federal government's jurisdiction to escape their current state of unpopularity.

The strength of the federalists is primarily the same strength that any predator relies on. As we know, a predator is someone who survives at another's expense, who uses their power to take advantage of another's weakness. The strength of federalists lies in the tools they have at their disposal to bring the people of Quebec to their knees. When I say “tools”, I am referring, of course, to the spending power that creates the fiscal imbalance. It is this pernicious system that allows them to bring the people of Quebec to their knees. Jean Chrétien, in all his splendour, once had an epiphany. He realized that he could cut transfer payments without paying a political price. That is where the fiscal imbalance comes from.

I would point out that this predatory federalism also suits the Conservatives. Although they claim to be more respectful of Quebec's autonomy, we heard what the Conservative leader has said in recent months. He was looking to establish some sort of electoral dominance at Quebec's expense. When he publicly and shamelessly says that he is going to challenge Bill 21 and Bill 96, he is serving the interests of the English-speaking majority in the rest of Quebec and trying to score election points for his own rather simple purposes. He is trying to appeal to ethnocultural communities in the greater Toronto area. That way, he can say to Quebec that its autonomy is very low on its list of concerns.

The Conservatives, the Liberals and the NDP respect Quebec's jurisdictions as long as it does not cause problems for them. If we take a closer look, we see that the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party and the NDP are parties that assume that the federal state is above Quebec, that North America's only francophone nation should fall in line like the others and that Quebecers should behave like Canadians, like everyone else. That is as typical of the Conservative Party, as it is of the NDP and the Liberal Party.

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I will close with this. Members may recall the Prime Minister's unfortunate comment that people “do not care” about jurisdictional bickering. They may also recall the unfortunate statement made by the leader of the Conservative Party, who said that Quebec mayors are “incompetent” and that he would manage housing production. I would say this ultimately shows that federalists could not care less about what Canadian federalism is. If that is the case, it opens the door wide to our sovereignty goals.

I would say that what Quebecers really do not care about are the federal government's excuses when it comes to immigration. They want immigration thresholds that are proportionate to our integration capacity, they want a system that meets the expectations of those who use it, and they want the federal government to reimburse Quebec for the services we have rendered. People do not care about the computer issues with Phoenix; they just want to be paid. People do not care about the issues with employment insurance; they want their benefits. Seniors do not care about the symbols of the monarchy; they want their pension to increase. Quebecers do not care about the products of big oil, the those greedy oil companies that took \$34 billion from us for a pipeline and will take \$83 billion from us by 2035; they want a health care system that meets their needs and that is not underfunded.

• (1045)

Lastly, I think that a significant portion of the population of Quebec does not care about federalism.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a question for my colleague from Joliette.

I respect all members here in the House, who ultimately represent their constituents. However, I have a jurisdictional question. We respect jurisdictions because we have a government-to-government approach. In a way, I am going to echo the words of Premier Legault, who asked what purpose the Bloc Québécois serves in Ottawa. Our governments discuss issues between the government in Ottawa and the Quebec government. We do not discuss them with the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Mario Simard: Madam Speaker, I could repeat the rather harsh words that Mr. Legault used to describe the Liberal government, but I will not pull an egregious stunt like that on my colleague. She can easily find out what he said in the media.

The Government of Quebec has been very critical of the implementation of pharmacare. The Government of Quebec was very critical of the implementation of dental care. It is not just Premier Legault, but all members of the National Assembly, who passed a motion telling the Liberal government that it was acting outside its jurisdiction. If that does not ring a bell for my colleague, I do not know how to make her come to her senses.

Business of Supply

• (1050)

[English]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, the provincial government recently had to take the federal Liberals to court over their inappropriate incursions into my province's jurisdictional right to develop its natural resources. The Supreme Court of Canada subsequently ruled against the federal Liberals and in favour of arguments from the provinces about how major resource projects should be approved in the country. The Liberals persist in violating provincial rights in this area.

Quebec has many natural resource projects that could be impacted by the Liberal government's inappropriate incursions into this jurisdiction, including its critical minerals strategy. Does the member believe that the principles in his party's motion today also apply to respecting the province's jurisdictional right to determine how it develops its natural resources?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Simard: Madam Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague. In fact, the Bloc Québécois has already introduced a bill to indicate that the provinces and Quebec should be responsible for any environmental assessments that deal with natural resource development.

However, there is something else that I would like to point out. I would go even farther than what my colleague is saying. I do not think it is right that Quebeckers, through their taxes, are being forced to finance a \$34-billion pipeline that will do them absolutely no good. I do not think it is right that Quebeckers, through their taxes, are being forced to give \$84 billion between now and 2035 to big oil, to multi-million dollar companies, when they do us absolutely no good. I would go even farther and say that I would allocate the money based on the natural resource development projects of each province and the Quebec nation.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois always says it is in favour of what is good for Quebec. Sometimes, it would be nice if it also looked at what is good for Quebeckers, for ordinary people who do not have dental insurance.

The NDP campaigned on a promise to come to Ottawa and secure this for people, and we did it. We are keeping our promises for the four million Quebeckers who have neither private nor public dental coverage. We have secured \$13 billion over five years.

That is about \$4 billion for Quebec that will be directly invested to help Quebeckers who could not afford dental care save money. Quebec has no program for seniors. Quebec has no program for teenagers. We are going to directly help people in need.

I was in my riding last week, and people were coming up to me and saying, "Thank you, Mr. Boulerice, for your work in Ottawa."

Mr. Mario Simard: Madam Speaker, I—

Some hon. members: He is not allowed to say his name.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Members may say their own name. They may not say the names of other members.

The hon. member for Jonquière.

Mr. Mario Simard: Madam Speaker, I would just like to point out to my colleague that what Quebeckers want is a health care system worthy of the name. The federal government is creating new programs after chronically underfunding the health care system. In a few years' time, it will slowly withdraw and put pressure on Quebec.

The dental insurance and pharmacare measures exist on paper only. The Government of Quebec candidly admits that it has no idea when they will materialize, because Ottawa did not consult with Quebec City. The only reason that pharmacare and dental insurance were introduced was to raise the Liberal Party and the NDP out of the polling basement. That is all.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizens' Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Châteauguay—Lacolle. I am pleased and grateful to have a chance to speak today, and I would like to take this opportunity to talk about our government's commitment to Quebec.

I am a proud MP from Quebec who represents a predominantly francophone rural region. I am an ardent defender of the French language, and I would like to point out that our collaboration with Quebec is very good. Since 2015, I have also been collaborating very well with the MNAs in my riding.

I am speaking today to point out that our government has always been there to support Quebec and that we certainly intend to keep helping all Quebeckers. The Bloc may not like that, because it is happier when there is bickering, but our record proves that we are able to work with the Quebec government and reach our goals for Quebec. Indeed, Quebec is an ally.

In the past, our government has agreed on many things with Quebec, such as the creation of day care spots, accelerated housing construction, health, infrastructure and operation high speed. During the COVID-19 crisis, members will recall that the federal government worked hand in hand with Quebec and provided most of the equipment and tools needed to keep the public healthy. We were there with the army and we took care of our senior centres. We collaborated fully with Quebec. That is the proof that Canada and Quebec work well together.

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Our government is there for Quebec and with Quebec. In 2024-25 alone, more than \$30 billion will be transferred to Quebec through federal transfers to help the Quebec government provide services to the public. These funds include additional amounts under the new health accord we signed with Quebec. This accord is for \$8.56 billion. That is significant. These additional amounts will be distributed over 10 years to improve health care in Quebec. Just yesterday, a health care crisis was declared in the national capital region, in Outaouais, my region. Doctors, professionals and therapists of all kinds have left the region to go to Ontario. The situation in the Outaouais region is dire. That is why the Government of Canada is there to support the Government of Quebec.

In particular, this extra funding will help improve access to front-line clinics and make it easier to book appointments through the *Votre Santé* health care platform. This new funding will also improve care for patients with rare or chronic conditions. Take diabetic Quebecers, for example. My daughter is one of them, because she has type 1 diabetes. This is a great example of how our plan is working thanks to our collaboration with Quebec.

I am also delighted that our colleague, the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, was in Montreal earlier this week to announce a major Boeing investment in Quebec's new aerospace innovation zone. On everything from the battery industry to innovation, aerospace and research, we are working with Quebec. Whether the Bloc likes it or not, we will continue to work with Quebec.

This major \$240-million investment is part of Boeing's industrial and technological benefits commitment. All of Quebec will benefit from this. Every Quebec riding will benefit from this investment, which is good news for our aerospace sector, not to mention all those in the aerospace supply chain. Our whole supply chain will benefit.

Another important example of collaboration is Canada-Quebec operation high speed. I am incredibly proud of this. It was one of the first files I worked on when I entered politics. Connectivity was a topic of discussion at all the first meetings I attended.

• (1055)

That is what we heard about in my riding in 2015. Canada-Quebec operation high speed got everything moving. The Bloc Québécois has a short memory. They complained that we were not doing enough, not working fast enough, and that we were overlooking the regions. Anytime there was a snag along the way, it was the federal government's fault. However, it should be remembered that we signed an agreement with the Quebec government in 2021. Because of that agreement, over 250,000 Quebec households now have Internet access at home. There was an urgent need at the time in my riding, in Bloc Québécois ridings and all across Quebec, so we collaborated with Quebec to improve connectivity in the province.

As I was saying, our plan is working. Not all the news is bad. We have a lot of good news.

I am delighted to see that our government has proposed a Canada-wide early learning and child care system largely inspired by Quebec's. Yes, Quebec is a role model. I am proud of Quebec's

models. We are taking these models that work and implementing them across Canada, all while improving the ones in Quebec. Obviously, Quebec benefits as well. As part of a \$6-billion agreement, Quebec has committed to creating 30,000 new child care spaces by March 2026. Since the *Grand Chantier pour les Familles* initiative was launched in October 2021, 20,500 additional subsidized spaces have been created. Our collaboration is working beautifully. Our child care system will help families a lot, but it does not end there.

Affordable child care services have also helped increase women's participation in the workforce. Once again, everything we do has a domino effect. We enabled women to return to work or enter the labour force for the first time. The labour force participation rate for women in their prime working years is at a record high. In September 2023, it was 85.7% in Canada, compared with only 74.4% in the United States. Think about the importance we place on women when we make it possible for them to return to work. This system also benefits the economy. When everyone is employed, the economy does well.

Our government's priority is to help Canadians. That is what we are doing by investing in health care, dental care, child care and housing. It is in that same spirit of helping Canadians that we are making other investments to make life in Canada more affordable.

We believe that our government should work in partnership, and we sincerely hope to be a partner for the Quebec government. When the provinces need to be encouraged to do just a bit more, our government will be there to encourage them and offer them more money so they can do it.

It is precisely in this spirit that we signed a \$1.8-billion agreement with Quebec last fall to accelerate housing construction. This is in addition to our other investments as part of the national housing strategy. The Quebec government and the Government of Canada are each investing \$900 million in this housing partnership. Our government has a long history of co-operation with Quebec when it comes to housing. This is the type of agreement we need in order to build more homes faster for future generations. This is exactly the type of win-win agreement that benefits Quebec and Quebecers. Obviously, when we co-operate, the people are the ones who benefit.

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The reality is that many Canadians need support to succeed. Our government wants to help wherever possible. We have been putting programs in place since 2015 to support the middle class and make things fairer for all generations, from coast to coast to coast. The Canada child benefit and the Canadian dental care plan are just two examples.

Budget 2024 continues to support the priorities of both Canadians and Quebecers through major investments in housing.

• (1100)

Housing is one of the key priorities in this budget. We are going to work with the provinces and territories to build more housing more quickly. As set out in last fall's agreement, we are going to accelerate housing construction in collaboration with the provinces and territories, whether the Bloc Québécois likes it or not.

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by my colleague opposite. On the subject of aerospace and this week's announcement, I think he is missing a few small details.

First, there were two announcements in one. The good thing is that we have an innovation zone, and that is Quebec City's doing. Ottawa has nothing to do with it.

The other announcement made at the same time, which is no doubt confusing, was a Boeing announcement that the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry took part in. All he said in this announcement was that they were working on the plane of the future. He said it earlier this week. However, I would remind the House that this plane of the future was built without a bidding process, excluding a Quebec giant in favour of a U.S. company announced late last fall. Things could have been done differently. The minister is rehashing old news when he says he is going to have a trickle-down policy, because he already announced that to sugar-coat the issue last fall.

I have a very simple question for my colleague. Just this week, in the so-called announcement made by Ottawa, exactly how much money will be invested in Boeing for that research?

• (1105)

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to answer this question. Whether the Bloc Québécois likes it or not, investments in Quebec's aerospace sector are good news. All the grocery CEOs and business leaders I have spoken with who are setting up shop in Quebec ridings, whether in Mirabel, Laurentides—Labelle or my colleague's riding, will benefit from significant economic spinoffs. Every business, every industry linked to Boeing, even the smallest local restaurant, will benefit.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, the measures in the Liberals' many announcements constitute interference in provincial jurisdictions. They are adding way more bureaucracy. We can expect a \$40-billion deficit this year. This is costing Canadian taxpayers a lot of money.

Does the Liberal member not understand that the Liberal government's actions are having a serious impact on Canada and on Canadians and their basic quality of life?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for making the notable effort of asking his question in French.

When we talk about the global economy, we are talking about having been through a pandemic, about war, about a difficult economy in terms of food, about many side effects, and about interest rates that have gone up.

The current government was there to help people during the pandemic. It is there for the middle class, for everyone in every riding. We helped hundreds of businesses and individuals get through the pandemic. We made the choice to invest in people and businesses to save the economy of the future for generations to come.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague talked about the importance of fighting the rising cost of living. It is true that it is difficult for many of the people we represent.

The new dental care program will save hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars for many people. Half of the population in Quebec has neither private nor public dental insurance. I am glad that the Liberal minority government has finally listened to the NDP. We twisted their arm a bit to agree to the dental care program, and the Liberals ended up saying yes. Now, it is real: we are starting to set up this program.

Can my colleague tell me how this program will help seniors and teenagers in his riding?

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Madam Speaker, I would like to remind my colleague that this program was introduced by the Liberal government.

Today, over two million people are already enrolled in this program; it is already making a difference in my riding. Over 9,500 oral care providers and specialists are already registered, with more to come this week and next. The program is working, and it is working well for the entire population of Quebec and Canada.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to stand today to discuss the motion by the member for Jonquière and Bloc Québécois critic for intergovernmental affairs, natural resources and energy.

I would like to address the issue of federal and provincial jurisdictions. I studied at the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi in 1978, 1979 and 1980, years that were eventful in Quebec's history. The experience was very enriching. We learned a great deal about the history, development and evolution of Canada, and especially about Confederation. We had very interesting discussions in the classrooms.

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What really struck me were the partnerships formed over the years. We can begin with the Patriotes who started a rebellion in Lower Canada in 1837 and 1838, and whom we have just celebrated in Quebec. This significant rebellion had very harmful consequences for those who took part in it, especially for the 58 Patriotes from Quebec who were exiled in Australia, but their words and their actions influenced the events around them.

There was also another rebellion in Upper Canada, less significant, but those events set off a discussion on the importance of having a responsible government, that is a government representative of citizens, especially for a rapidly developing society.

A few decades later Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine and Robert Baldwin formed a partnership to remove those in power and demand the establishment of a government accountable to the British Empire. At one point, Mr. LaFontaine's family even took care of Mr. Baldwin's children in Quebec, and one of Mr. Baldwin's children became a sister in the Ursuline convent, which is very touching.

Clearly I like history a lot, but it is important to recognize that our country's history is the history of people, real people, who felt it was more important to work together than to separate. We need not look any further than the famous partnership between John A. Macdonald and George-Étienne Cartier, who signed an agreement, with all the other Fathers of Confederation, which recognized the powers of the provinces while placing them under the umbrella of the federal government. This agreement stressed both the importance of respecting these powers along with having a responsible local government when it comes to business, social services, education, health care, etc.

Because there were wars during those years, either with our neighbours in the United States or with countries in Europe, it was important for the federal government to have the power to defend the country and maintain order in society to ensure everyone's safety.

• (1110)

I know I am going a long way back in history, but I want to bring us up to the present day and explain why the Canadian Constitution is not just an asset, but a guarantee of our democracy, our freedom and our rights for everyone who lives in Canada, regardless of which province they are in. The Canadian Constitution guarantees all Canadians the same rights and freedoms.

That said, I should talk about what is happening today to show how this wonderful collaboration between the federal government and the Government of Quebec is continuing.

My colleague gave the example of child care. This is a great example of how Quebec was a pioneer. I benefited from it when my daughter was in day care 35 years ago. I now have a grandchild, and a few years ago, when my daughter and her husband were living in New York, they were worried about how they were going to pay for child care. Now they have moved to Halifax. I was ecstatic when she called me to say that she and her husband had found child care for Roy, that it was not too expensive and that she was able to go back to work. Quebec led the way on this issue.

I always say that it is Canada that needs Quebec. It is a partnership that continues to this day and that enables us to pool our talents and abilities. An asymmetrical agreement on child care that was signed with Quebec will allocate nearly \$6 billion between 2021 and 2026 and provide so many opportunities across the country and in Quebec. Indeed, the federal capacity to partner financially helped Quebec open more child care spaces. Naturally, we are very proud of this system.

Housing is another good example. I will talk about something that is vital in my riding and in those neighbouring mine in Montérégie. I had the opportunity to go to the riding of the member for Salaberry-Suroît a few weeks ago for an announcement on affordable housing. Forty-eight homes will be built. I was joined by the provincial MNA, the mayor, stakeholders and the member for Salaberry-Suroît. We were very pleased to make this announcement together. We also promised that other housing would be built. This happened thanks to a \$900-million contribution to Quebec from the housing accelerator fund to speed the construction of residential housing in Quebec. The Quebec government added another \$900 million.

We work hand-in-hand to achieve the critical mass to implement this priority, which is a priority for both governments, and on which we consulted to reach this agreement. Yes, it sometimes takes time to reach agreements between the federal and provincial governments, but working together is worth it. We need only think of our colleagues of old, the Patriotes, Baldwin, LaFontaine, and all others who worked together to make our country what it is today.

• (1115)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am dumbstruck. I do not really know how to respond to what people have been saying about our opposition motion all morning. Something my colleague from Terrebonne said this week on social media really stuck with me. The Liberals are good for nothing but spending more and doing less. I am paraphrasing, but that is what I have been hearing. The consequences are profound.

The member who spoke earlier sang the praises of what the government has done for the aerospace industry, but the Bloc Québécois is the only party calling for a meaningful national strategy, which is what the aerospace industry itself wants. That member and this one have been bragging about investments. They talked about helping seniors, but the federal government, which is responsible for pensions, cannot even do that job properly. It is maintaining two classes of seniors by refusing to increase benefits to help seniors aged 65 to 74, who are in dire straits. That is incompetence. It is also increasing the number of public servants without delivering any more services to people.

I have so much more to say, but I will stop there.

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• (1120)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Speaker, I have a lot of respect for my colleague. I know that she has been a strong advocate for seniors in my riding, and I have some good news. The dental care program is working. It is working—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The hon. member for Shefford had the opportunity to ask her question. She should listen to the answer. If she has any further comments, she should wait until the appropriate time.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Speaker, I recently did the rounds at FADOQ's end-of-the-year dinners and at every table where I lingered, someone greeted me, shook my hand and thanked me for this dental care program. They had appointments to get their teeth fixed.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest at the background our colleague provided, but I want to come to the reality and to the future, where meaningful care is being provided to Quebecers under the dental care program. This program does not in any way dictate to Quebec City how to run the health care network, or create federal dentists or federal dental clinics, but instead pays the bills that people are otherwise unable to pay.

There are already 90,000 people being treated under this program, including thousands of Quebecers. They are people who, in some cases, were unable to have access to a dentist for decades. I would like my colleague to say a few words about how this program is going to help not only seniors in her riding, but also teenagers, who will be able to register for the program starting next month.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Speaker, I completely agree with my colleague. Having a dental care program will affect every aspect of health. Research shows how our oral health affects us by being linked to Alzheimer's and heart disease. When I think about the young people who are going to have the chance to have a beautiful smile, that is priceless.

[English]

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member about the federal government's support to the sectors that are very important to Quebec, such as Quebec's efforts to develop a clean economy, its aerospace sector and the sectors where it has strength in artificial intelligence. For example, in the recent budget, the federal government is looking to invest \$2 billion to support the artificial intelligence sector, and another \$200 million to support various companies in sectors such as health care, agriculture and manufacturing to allow for artificial intelligence.

Can the hon. member explain how that would not only strengthen Quebec but also help all Canadians across Canada?

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for that question because Châteauguay—Lacolle, soon to be Châteauguay—Les Jardins-de-Napierville, is an agricultural hub, and our farmers are at the forefront of technology, which allows for expanding agricultural production without increasing greenhouse gases. We have carbon capture companies working in this area that have received federal money for their research, and they are very appreciative of the federal support to continue their work.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Before I begin, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with the excellent member for Carleton.

What I say in the next few minutes is not intended as a personal attack on the Bloc Québécois or its members. There are a lot of very good people in the Bloc. I want to talk about the Bloc today in more general terms.

First off, we fully agree with today's motion. That is how the Conservatives have always done things: We have always respected the provinces' areas of jurisdiction. It is part of our DNA, and we have no objections. However, we do have questions about the contradictions in the Bloc Québécois's behaviour and actions.

First, it is important to understand that the Bloc's primary motivation is separation, or Quebec sovereignty. It is in their policy platform, and they make no secret of it. Everyone knows that the Bloc wants Quebec to leave Canada.

It is also important to understand that the Bloc members were elected by about 30% of the population of Quebec. The other 70%, including my colleagues and myself, are just as much Quebecers as the members of the Bloc. The 70% of Quebecers who did not vote for the Bloc also have hopes and dreams for the Quebec nation, just like the Bloc does. It is time to stop playing around and always saying that the Bloc members are real Quebecers, while members from the other parties are not. That is the message we keep getting here in Parliament.

There is another contradiction. According to the Bloc, and as the Bloc candidate who ran against me in 2021 said publicly, when a member of the Bloc gets elected, they are sitting in a foreign country's Parliament. A Bloc candidate runs for office, gets elected by maybe 30% or 40% of the people in their riding, and tells Quebecers that they are going to represent them in a foreign country's Parliament. That is always how it has been, and it has been the same story for 30 years.

Now let me get to the most serious contradiction.

The leader of the Bloc has repeated, as his own slogan, that if something is good for Quebec, the Bloc will vote for it, and if it is not good for Quebec, the Bloc will vote against it. That is what the leader of the Bloc Québécois says publicly. As a Quebecer, I can say that that is not necessarily a bad thing. It is truly an approach focused on Quebec's main interests, on co-operation with the Canadian federation. We cannot be against that.

However, we have seen the concrete actions the Bloc has taken when voting on budgets, which are contradictory. The Bloc Québécois publicly says that it votes against all the budgets because they are no good, which is true. The Bloc members vote this way for various reasons, saying that they are against them, so people think that the Bloc Québécois votes against the Liberal government's budgets.

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However, there is the important matter of budgetary appropriations. The Bloc Québécois has voted in favour of all the supplementary appropriations, totalling \$500 billion, but that is something it does not boast about.

I heard the leader of the Bloc answer a question from my colleague from Louis-Saint-Laurent on this very topic this morning. He answered that they would not do like in the U.S. and start shutting down the government. That is how he justified approving \$500 billion in additional spending. These appropriations added 109,000 public servants to the government apparatus. Among other things, these appropriations were used to give millions of dollars, tens of millions of dollars, for ArriveCAN.

When a scandal breaks out, the Bloc members are suddenly astonished to discover that they voted in favour of granting the money. In a public exchange, reporters asked the Bloc Québécois House leader a question, and he answered by asking whether they thought that the Bloc members had the time to study every single budget item. Is that not their job? There are 32 of them, and they have their own research teams and staff. What do they do all day? In our party, we scrutinize every budget item. That is why we vote against them most of the time, because they make no sense.

The Bloc says publicly that it votes against the budgets when, in fact, it votes in favour of all the appropriations, while claiming that it has no time to study them. What is the primary responsibility of an elected official? It is to know what they are voting for and to vote against it when it is something that makes no sense.

• (1125)

The leader of the Bloc Québécois often says that the Bloc members are the adults in the room, that they are the best and that they truly work for Quebecers, yet they voted in favour of \$500 billion in additional spending by this government, which, by the way, is the worst government in the history of Canada.

This government has doubled our country's debt, which means that Quebecers' living conditions are appalling nowadays and everything is much more expensive. Inflation and the increase in interest rates and the cost of living in general, particularly the cost of housing, have skyrocketed, in large part because of this government's mismanagement. The Bloc Québécois approved this reckless spending.

As an organization, the Bloc Québécois is a left-wing, socialist party. We know that. Members of the Bloc have admitted it, have said it. How can they reconcile fiscal responsibilities with always wanting to support socialist, left-wing measures and exponential spending? They cannot have it both ways. They cannot say that they are the responsible adults in the room and then vote with their eyes closed. As the leader of the Bloc Québécois said, the Bloc members do not have time to look at that. It is difficult to vote with one's eyes closed, to vote for spending that just creates problems for Canadians today. In the House, we have done nothing to help anyone over the past nine years. No one has been helped. We just have more problems now than we did in 2015.

Take, for example, the supply vote. Since the new Bloc Québécois leader arrived in 2019, 219 votes have been considered confidence votes, such as votes on budgetary allocations or on mo-

tions similar to the one that the Conservative Party moved a month ago. The Bloc Québécois had 219 opportunities to vote against this government that it is criticizing, and we agree with those criticisms. However, instead, the Bloc Québécois voted in favour of appropriations 200 times. They did not support the non-confidence motion and they supported the government. They could have said that they had had enough, but 92% of the time they did not. They chose instead to continue to support this government's out-of-control spending.

I will give an example of this spending so that it appears in the public record. Let us take Bill C-36, appropriation act No. 4, 2022-23. The tenor of the bill is not obvious from the title. If we do not take the time to look into it, we really have no way of knowing what it is about. By way of information, it represents \$20.7 billion in spending. Here is another example: Bill C-16, appropriation act No. 1, 2022-23. Our viewers will not know what I am talking about. I am talking about more than \$75.483 trillion in spending. There are a lot of things in this bill, like pipelines. The Bloc Québécois voted for pipelines in the north. The Bloc supported the bill, despite the fact that the member for Jonquière rails against the oil and gas industry every day in the House. The Bloc voted for it. They did not know that the bill contained anything about pipelines, because they did not read it.

Here is another example: Bill C-24, appropriation act No. 2, 2022-23. It represents \$115.056 trillion and change. By "change", I mean a few hundred thousand dollars. Bill C-54, appropriation act No. 2, 2023-24, represents \$108,700,157,669. These are only four examples from a long list of spending supported by the Bloc Québécois. They can say what they want. They will do a lot of things here and there and say that they are the adults and the responsible ones, but, in reality, they have supported this spendthrift government whose spending is out of control. Today we have problems, and these problems were supported by the Bloc Québécois.

Why did the Bloc Québécois support this government when the Liberals have an agreement with the NDP, which is always there to support the government, no matter what? The Bloc Québécois could have done the same thing the Conservative Party did: vote against the Liberals' nonsense and ensure that the country is truly managed effectively. The fact is that their objective is to get Quebec to separate. The Bloc's actions are meant to give them reasons to say that things are not going well in the other camp.

• (1130)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his speech. I would just like to correct him and point out that we do not say "supporter" in French for "support". We say "appuyer" or "soutenir". "Supporter" is an anglicism in this context.

The Bloc Québécois was not deluded when it came here to defend Quebec's interests. The reason there are 32 of us in the House is that Quebecers understood that they needed us to defend their interests in the House because nobody else was doing it.

Business of Supply

This being said, I would like to tell my colleague something. If we had voted against the appropriations, many employees of the federal government in Quebec would not have been paid. Many seniors would not have received their benefits, which are paid out by the federal government for now, until Quebec becomes independent.

Our goal here is not to sabotage the government just for the sake of sabotaging the government politically, for populist reasons. Our goal is to take concrete action to ensure that Quebec is always as high a priority as possible in the federal context until things change, and I think that change is coming fast.

• (1135)

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague. She confirms precisely what we have been saying: the Bloc Québécois voted for these budget appropriations, while there is an official agreement between the NDP and the Liberals. In the circumstances, it is impossible to defeat a budgetary vote.

The Bloc Québécois could have taken the time to work, study the credits and say they would not vote for them for such and such a reason, but no. These MPs voted as a bloc for each of the \$500-billion items. Let them stop trying to be the adult in the room again. There was an agreement on the other side. The government could not fall, even if we voted against it. The Bloc Québécois could have stood with us and said it was against the current government's extravagant spending.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, former prime minister Stephen Harper inherited a health care accord that saw incremental increases in health care expenditures. A lot of Canadians are very much concerned with that, because when it came time to renew the health care accord, the Harper government did absolutely nothing. In fact, it cut back the 6% to 3%. I am not 100% sure of that figure, but I believe that to be factual.

Could the member specifically tell Canadians about the role of health care? Does the Conservative Party believe it is nothing more than a transfer of cash payments to provinces? Does it believe there is another role for health care delivery?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, what is clear for the Conservative Party is that we must respect jurisdictions. Health transfers must be made to the provinces. The provinces are the masters of health care management.

We have no place interfering in provincial business, because health and education are provincial matters. Because Quebec is a big boy or a big girl, depending on how one looks at it, Quebec is capable of managing health care. On the federal side, we transfer the funds and we do not have to interfere as the Liberals do.

[English]

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Speaker, we often talk about jurisdiction, and a jurisdiction that we often exclude in this place is the jurisdiction of indigenous peoples.

It is clear that in the case of Quebec, there have been many instances where the government has attempted to claw jurisdiction that is not necessarily the jurisdiction that is most appropriate for first nations.

Could the member elaborate on whether his party would support the claims of indigenous people, particularly first nations, who claim that Quebec is attempting to erase their history?

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Madam Speaker, I will not answer on behalf of the Quebec government, but I can say that relations between the Quebec government and indigenous people are going very well. This is the place, I think, where treaties and ways of working with indigenous communities are among the best in Canada.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is in the midst of an identity crisis.

The Bloc Québécois is trying to go in two totally different directions. First, the Bloc Québécois claims to be a separatist party whose goal is to finally get rid of the federal government's control over the Quebec nation and the lives of Quebecers. Then, according to its leader, the Bloc Québécois is a "progressive, socially democratic" party. It shares the same ideology as the current Liberal Prime Minister. The Bloc wants a big government that directs the economy with huge taxes, deficits, regulations, programs and industry subsidies. It wants a government that extends its tentacles everywhere.

Although I do not share these two objectives, namely socialism and sovereignty, a party in Quebec's National Assembly can coherently propose both at the same time. It can propose the separation of Quebec from the rest of Canada and the creation of a massive welfare state in Quebec. I think it is a bad idea, but at least we know that it could be part of a coherent approach. The problem is that the Bloc Québécois is not a provincial party in the Quebec National Assembly. It is a federal party in Ottawa, and its socially democratic demands are helping to expand the size of the federal government.

In this zero-sum game, when the federal government has more money and power, this leaves less money and power for Quebec and Quebecers. Every taxpayer dollar spent in Ottawa leaves a dollar less for the Government of Quebec or Quebec taxpayers. Do not take it from me; this comes from Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, or PSPP. He calculated that Quebecers pay \$82 billion to Ottawa in taxes. Most of the taxes that Quebecers pay the federal government goes back to Quebecers in the form of child benefits, payments for seniors or transfers for health care and social services that are received by the Government of Quebec. PSPP seems to be saying that there is even more money that does not go back to Quebec. Where did that money go? It went to budgetary appropriations.

Budgetary appropriations refer to money that is voted on in Parliament and spent to fund the bureaucracy, consultants, agencies, contributions to corporations, and interest groups. It is basically the big federal monster in Ottawa that sovereignists want to separate from.

Business of Supply

One would think that a separatist party would have voted against all the budget allocations that feed this federal monster, but that is not what happened. In fact, since arriving in the House of Commons in 2019, the leader of the Bloc Québécois has voted in favour of all of this Liberal Prime Minister's budget allocations. On 205 occasions, the Bloc leader has voted to authorize a total of \$500 billion in additional government spending. That is almost equal to Quebec's GDP. We are talking about \$500 billion, half a trillion dollars. That money did not go toward old age security or health, since such expenditures are already set out in legislation and we do not need to vote to authorize them. The Bloc Québécois voted in favour of the federal machine in Ottawa, in favour of hiring an additional 100,000 public servants and pumping 50% more money into the federal bureaucracy. The Bloc voted to double spending on private consultants. It voted for \$21 billion in spending, or \$1,400 per Quebec family, for federal consultants.

● (1140)

This includes financing ArriveCAN, which cost \$25 million, when the Liberal government promised it would cost only \$80,000.

Again, I find it fascinating that a Quebec party that calls itself separatist never supports measures seeking to reduce the federal tax burden shouldered by Quebecers. It never supports income tax cuts. One would think a separatist party would always oppose Quebecers being forced to send their money to Ottawa, but this is not true for Bloc Québécois members. They want, in their own words, to radically increase taxes. Furthermore, the Bloc Québécois voted in favour of Bill C-11, which gives the CRTC, a federal agency, full control over what Quebecers can see and post on social media.

Even its support of Radio-Canada is paradoxical. The Bloc Québécois wants to separate from Canada, which would expel Radio-Canada from Quebec, but at the same time, it says that Radio-Canada is essential to the culture and media of Quebec. Apparently, it believes that Canada and the federal government are essential to Quebec life. This is not very separatist of them either.

The real question is, how would a sovereign Quebec under the leader of the Bloc Québécois be different from the Canada led by the current Prime Minister? The Bloc Québécois supports high taxes, massive federal debt and a bloated bureaucracy that meddles in everything but is good at nothing.

We should also remember that the Bloc Québécois supports a justice system that frees repeat offenders and bans hunting rifles. In fact, an independent Quebec with the leader of the Bloc Québécois as premier would be almost identical to the federal state led by the current Prime Minister.

Luckily for the Bloc Québécois, its fantasies of a welfare state have already become very real in Canada under the current Prime Minister, with all the government programs, bureaucracy, taxes, deficits and regulations. Everyone depends on the government. This is a dream for left-wing ideologues like the leaders of the Bloc Québécois, the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party, but it is a nightmare for the working class, with housing, food and everything else being unaffordable. There is more homelessness, poverty and desperation.

The Bloc Québécois does not offer Quebecers either sovereignty or independence. Instead, it offers a more costly, centralist and indebted federal government, exactly like the Liberals. The Liberal Bloc is not a pro-independence party but a pro-dependence party. It defends what it depends on. The Bloc Québécois depends on the federal government for its pensions and paycheques and for all its ideological dreams, which are in reality centralist.

However, with our common-sense plan, we will axe the tax, build the homes, not the bureaucracy, and fix the budget by capping spending and cutting waste. In short, with a small federal government, we will let Quebecers make their own decisions. They could decide to keep more money in their pockets or to give more money to their government in Quebec City. It will be up to them. This is a message for Quebecers: With the Liberal Bloc, the federal government is master of your house, but with the common-sense Conservatives, Quebecers will be master of their own house.

Thank you very much.

● (1145)

Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): I listened very carefully to the Leader of the Opposition telling us that he has discovered a past, present and future passion for provincial autonomy. Under the Harper government, that may not have been how Premier Charest, the darling of Quebec Conservatives, felt about it, but never mind.

Let us fast-forward to today. Since the Leader of the Opposition is so keen on respecting provincial jurisdictions, can he promise here and now that a future Conservative government will never push through an oil or gas pipeline project without Quebec's consent?

● (1150)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, I know why the Bloc Québécois does not want the approach of the Harper years, because in the Harper years we reduced the role of the federal government, we decentralized powers and respected the powers of the provinces, which eliminated the Bloc Québécois.

At that time, the Bloc Québécois had four seats. Quebecers wondered why they needed the Bloc Québécois, and the Conservatives let them make their own decisions. Furthermore, they had autonomy and a Prime Minister who respected Quebec. When it came to issues they did not agree on, the federal government did not interfere in their business, so they were okay.

Now the Bloc Québécois's entire *raison d'être* revolves around this centralist Prime Minister. That is why we saw this lovefest yesterday between the Prime Minister and the Bloc Québécois, who were applauding one another.

We are the nightmare of the Bloc-Liberal coalition, but we will be wonderful for people who respect the autonomy of all provinces, including Quebec.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I think of programs like the national dental program, and the national pharmacare program that is being proposed. I think of the health care agreements, where we saw a federal government demonstrate a tangible interest in developing more on mental health and long-term care. The federal government, through the Canada Health Act, does have a very important role to play in delivering health care in our communities.

The question I have for the member is this: Contrary to what the former Conservative speaker stated, does the current leader of the Conservative Party believe that the federal government has more of a role than just providing cash to provinces?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, if the government does have more of a role, then that role has been to extend wait times and make emergency rooms even more full of people. Since the Prime Minister said he was going to get more involved in health care, wait times have doubled, so if he wants the power, he has to take the responsibility and explain why he has failed so badly.

Then he talks about other grand federal programs, which is interesting, such as a dental program that has not cleaned a single tooth. There is a housing program that has doubled the cost of housing and increased severe homelessness by 88%. Then there is the pharmacare program, which has not delivered a single jar of medicine and which, if actually implemented, would ban Canadians from having their private drug plans.

The Prime Minister and the NDP want to roll back the rights that unions have fought so hard and so long to secure. Our labour movement fought too hard to secure private drug plans, and we will never let a big, centralizing, bureaucratic government in Ottawa take those rights away from workers.

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, unions across the country are in support of universal pharmacare and the delivery of diabetes medication to Canadians. The Leader of the Opposition and his family have one of the best health care plans in the country. I met a mother who was so concerned about how she cannot afford medication, and—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I cannot hear the question, and I am sure the official opposition leader is having a hard time hearing the question because his own members are heckling the member for Victoria. I would ask them to hold back and, if they have questions and comments, to wait until the appropriate time.

The hon. member for Victoria.

Ms. Laurel Collins: Madam Speaker, the mom told me she could barely think about anything except how much the medication and devices cost for her daughter who has diabetes. She is three or four years old. I do not know how anyone could look that little girl in the eye and say that she does not deserve access to life-saving medication.

Why does the member think that he and his family deserve coverage and that this family and families just like it across Canada do not?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre: Madam Speaker, first of all, if the member thinks that parliamentarians have coverage that is too good, she could put forward a motion to cut it back. Instead, what she has done is propose to cut back drug plans for everyday Canadians, particularly unionized Canadians. Roughly 90% of Canadians have some drug coverage, but the bill that the NDP and the Liberals have put forward would require a single payer. “Single payer” means only a federal government plan, so she would ban private and even provincial plans and replace them with a federal government plan. A government that cannot even figure out how to deliver a passport would suddenly become responsible for providing people with drug coverage.

How does the member look hard-working Canadians in the eye while she promises to take away their hard-won drug coverage secured through collective bargaining?

● (1155)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Once again, I would like to remind all members of the House not to disturb others who have the floor, not to make comments or ask them questions. There are appropriate times to do that.

[English]

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski.

[Translation]

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would first like to say that I will be sharing my time with the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

I rise—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I would ask those who are having discussions to take them out of the House and into the lobby. That would be more appropriate, especially after what I just said.

The hon. member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski may continue.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to the troubling motion that the Bloc Québécois moved today and that we are trying to amend. This motion poses serious issues for the future of Quebecers and Canada as a whole.

I will begin by saying that the NDP is unequivocally committed to respecting Quebec and we recognize that Quebec is a distinct nation within Canada. In fact, the NDP is proud to have recognized that when it adopted the Sherbrooke declaration several years ago under our former leader Jack Layton, with whom I had the privilege of serving.

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I also want to recognize Quebec's unique history when it comes to social programs and the concept of collective well-being. The federal government must take a leadership role and make vital investments to meet the needs of Quebeckers and Canadians.

It is clear from Quebec's cultural history that the Quebec nation has a rich heritage. The NDP is progressive and we recognize that Quebec is a nation and that it both has and deserves the right to self-determination. We recognized this long before the Liberals and Conservatives. The Quiet Revolution was one of the great progressive and social democratic revolutions, not only in the history of Quebec, but also in the history of North America. It marks the moment when Quebeckers took their destiny into their own hands.

Our former leaders, Jack Layton and Thomas Mulcair, as well as our current leader from Burnaby South have made it clear: Quebec is a nation with its own history. Federal decisions must be made with that reality in mind. It is clear—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Order. I must ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to see what is happening outside the chamber. There seems to be a lot of noise. Could he ask people to continue their discussions outside?

The hon. member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski may continue.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Clearly, Madam Speaker, Quebec must be consulted on issues that affect Quebeckers. We feel that the back-and-forth between the federal government and the provinces may be a good thing for social policy. We think that it is by working together rather than unilateral action from the federal government that the best social policies are developed.

However, it is also true that a number of Quebec voices clearly support a federal dental care program and this program will improve the lives of many Quebeckers. The same thing happened during the debate on the Canada Health Act; there were discussions about that act and how it impacted provincial jurisdictions. Today it is seen as a done deal. It is one of our country's main values.

One day, the same will hold true for the dental care and pharmacare programs. I am proud that it is thanks to the NDP that we can move forward on these programs.

I want to be clear and to ensure that the voices of Quebeckers who support our dental care program and our pharmacare program are heard. The Centrale des syndicats démocratiques, or CSD, the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, or CSN, the Centrale des syndicats du Québec, or CSQ, and the Fédération des travailleuses et travailleurs du Québec, or FTQ, have been calling for public pharmacare for a long time. They have applauded this first step and are asking for more. It makes me wonder why the Bloc Québécois is ignoring Quebec's union leaders and the voices of Quebec workers on this issue.

According to CSD president Luc Vachon, it is unconscionable that a person's health should depend on their income or be open to negotiation. Even though Quebec has its own system, it discriminates against low-income individuals. A truly public and universal system must guarantee all people the right to easy access to medication. The time has come to set aside constitutional wrangling and ensure that everyone has real access to affordable medication.

The CSN believes that Quebec is going in the wrong direction by demanding an unconditional right to opt out. For the CSN, it would not be acceptable for Quebec to receive federal funding with no strings attached in order to maintain a dysfunctional and unfair system. The CSN calls on the federal government to be open to provinces that wish to fund universal provincial public plans. Why is the Bloc Québécois opposing what the CSN is saying?

We base our position on the enthusiastic messages we received from Quebeckers about the dental care program. Over 600,000 of them have signed up for dental care. Why is the Bloc Québécois opposed to these 600,000 registered individuals? Once again, the facts are clear.

The NDP plan would benefit 2.5 million Quebeckers and would save seniors \$1,000 a year already. We already have 10,000 dental care providers registered.

The following questions deserve to be asked of the Bloc Québécois: Why is this party, which claims to be the great defender of Quebec, opposing the union leaders of the FTQ, the CSD, and others? Why does the Bloc oppose the 600,000 Quebeckers who have signed up for the program? The big question is, why is the Bloc Québécois working so hard to defend provinces outside Quebec that are led by right-wing governments?

• (1200)

[English]

I would like to turn to the speech we just heard from the leader of the official opposition. At some point he referred to nightmares and dreams. I could say that what his speech in the House symbolizes for so many Canadians, particularly low-income Canadians and working Canadians, is in fact the nightmare that we would have to deal with if we had a government led by the leader of the official opposition.

Canadians remember the dark Harper years, when social programs were cut and health care investments were cut. In fact there were changes to investment formulas to provinces, which ensured that provinces like mine got less money than they needed to be able to live up to the needs of their communities. Manitoba still has not recovered from the cuts brought in by the Harper government.

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However, let us be clear: The Bloc is defending right-wing premiers and right-wing governments across Canada that are bringing our public universal health care system to its knees. We have seen the cuts in Ontario; we have seen the declarations from Premier Danielle Smith in Alberta, and the future for people in those provinces is particularly ugly. We have seen the way in which they are pushing privatized health care. They are taking away from the public health care in prioritizing privatized health care, all the while eroding universal health care that Canadians depend on. In effect, the Bloc is not just positioning itself against the interests of labour unions, working people, the 600,000 Quebecers who have signed up for the dental care program and the many who have spoken of the importance of pharmacare as well. The Bloc is also, for some bizarre reason, defending right-wing premiers outside of Quebec who are all too committed to gutting public health care.

We in the NDP will not let them do that. We are clear: We stand in solidarity with union leaders, with unionized workers in Quebec, with the 600,000 Quebecers who signed up for the dental care program and the many more who we know will sign up in the months to come. We are saying that we must move forward to expand universal health care when it comes to dental care, when it comes to pharmacare and when it comes to the broader vision of health care that leaders like Tommy Douglas and others talked about so many years ago. It is inconceivable that in a country as wealthy as Canada, we are not able to look after one another and we are not able to look after our citizens in the ways that they need it. Just a few weeks ago, I had a chance to speak with a diabetes nurse here in my home community of Thompson. She talked about the challenges and how difficult it is to work with patients who cannot afford the medication and the equipment that they need when it comes to diabetes.

I will finish by saying that I am proud to stand for constituents who desperately need what pharmacare would mean to them and who desperately need what dental care would mean to them. I am proud of the NDP's position, which relies on the Sherbrooke declaration and says yes to public universal health care, dental care and pharmacare and no to the political games of the Bloc, the right-wing premiers and the leader of the official opposition.

• (1205)

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Canadian federal system is collaborative in nature. Canadians face complex issues. These complex issues do not start and end at the boundary of any province. There is a need for the federal government and the provinces and territories to work together to address the needs of Canadians. I would like to have the hon. member's comment on that.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, it is clear here that we are seeing, under the guise of provincial jurisdiction, an effort by the Bloc Québécois to unfortunately erode gains being made when it comes to expanding health care. However, let us also be clear that the Conservatives are very much in line with pushing privatized health care and doing away with public universal medicare and certainly its expansion. I would say finally that I am really proud that the NDP has been pushing for dental care and pharmacare and pushing the Liberals to move on this front. Without the NDP, we would not be here fighting for what so many Canadians deserve.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am always surprised to hear anyone mention the Sherbrooke declaration, when the NDP is constantly behaving like a government that wants to run a province. That is the case here, and my colleague just gave an example. She started accusing the Bloc Qu eb cois of being insensitive when we talk about interference when people are affected.

Of course I see the effects. First, the National Assembly unanimously called for the right to opt out with compensation from dental insurance because Quebec is capable of managing its own system. I say this because any attempt to interfere will cause duplication and longer delays. People in my riding of Shefford have been coming to see me, saying they have not been able to register and they are having problems. The process is long and complex.

That is what happens when the government tries to interfere in a jurisdiction that is not its own. It creates duplication, causes further delays and, in the end, it is the people who pay the price.

• (1210)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I would say to my colleague that the fact that she has constituents who want to register and access this program shows that Quebecers and Canadians see the importance of this type of program. I wonder why the Bloc Qu eb cois is against it. If they want to collaborate on improving the registration process and finding solutions for a program that is in its early stages, then we invite them to do so.

Instead of that type of collaboration, we are seeing political games, where the Bloc Qu eb cois is going against many Quebecers, the unions, Quebec citizens on the issue of dental care and pharmacare. In the meantime, it is collaborating with the right outside Quebec, who simply want to attack our health care system. It is unacceptable.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would simply like to indicate this to my colleague. Indeed, Quebec's has a hybrid pharmacare program; it is limited and imperfect. Do not take my word for it. It was Dr. Rochon who said that Quebec's program was a good start, that it was ahead of its time, but that it needed to be complemented by a public, universal plan, which is the only way to control the cost of drugs.

That is why union groups at the FTQ, CSD and CSN in Quebec agree with bringing in a public, universal pharmacare program because it will benefit Quebecers.

I would like my colleague's thoughts on that.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, that is absolutely true, and union leaders at the CSD, CSN and FTQ have made clear statements to that effect.

On behalf of Quebecers, I thank my colleague for his leadership when it comes to the importance of dental care and pharmacare. Clearly, the Bloc Québécois is not giving a second thought to the labour movement and the 600,000 Quebecers who have signed up for these programs. If it respected them, it would not be moving this motion today, and it would not be attacking these programs.

I look forward to hearing my colleague's speech, which will surely present the views of Quebecers who want a better health care system.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House to talk about issues that are extremely important to the people we represent across Quebec.

I want to begin by making two points.

First, we often hear Bloc Québécois members or their leader say that, for the Bloc, it is not complicated: When something is good for Quebec, they vote in favour and when it is not good for Quebec, they vote against it. It is all very simple, but there are questions the Bloc members never seem to consider, such as whether it is good for Quebecers, good for Quebec workers and their families, good for Quebec seniors, and good for Quebec youth. The Bloc always brings up a unanimous vote in the National Assembly, but will that actually do anything to help ordinary people? Will it change anything in their lives?

This makes me think about why I got into politics, which was to stand up for workers' rights, defend social justice, fight poverty and make our society more just and equitable. I always ask myself whether it is good for Quebecers and good for the people I represent in my riding.

The second thing is that we cannot overlook the fundamental contradiction that makes it hard for the Bloc to take a constructive approach in this place. Its entire narrative centres on the premise that the federal government is bad and does not work. In all fairness, sometimes it does not work or work well. At other times, however, it works effectively and accomplishes good things. The Bloc cannot admit to that because it clashes with the narrative that it wants to propagate. Any success has to be ignored to avoid undermining the Bloc's fundamental premise. For years, we have seen Bloc members choose to support their lines of argumentation rather than support people, whereas the NDP is here to help people.

What can we do to move issues forward and solve problems instead of constantly trying to portray the federal government as the big bad wolf? Sometimes it is the big bad wolf. Sometimes it is ineffective, as we saw in the case of passports and, for years, on the immigration file. If, however, positive and constructive accomplishments are possible, why not support them? That is why we entered politics, to represent the people in our ridings, to help others, and to assist the people who voted for us.

I understand that the Bloc Québécois garnered 1.3 million votes in the last election, but it is not necessarily up to the Bloc to decide what is good for Quebec. Why should it have the monopoly or exclusivity on what is good for Quebec? Some people voted for the Conservative Party of Canada. Some people voted for the Liberal

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Party of Canada. Some people voted for the Green Party of Canada. Some 400,000 Quebecers even voted for the NDP.

The Bloc Québécois received about one-third of the votes. However, the NDP unfortunately does not have the equivalent of one-third of the Bloc's members, since we do not have a proportional representation system in Canada. However, 400,000 Quebecers sent us here and asked us, among other things, to get them better health care and to expand their treatment services, health care system and dental care.

The NDP decided to go to Ottawa and fight for them to get easier access to dental care. That is what we have done. We hold the balance of power, and we used that. We negotiated with the Liberals to force them to do things they never agreed to before. Now, of course, they are taking credit for it. That is to be expected; that is politics. However, in the past, they always voted against dental care and against universal public pharmacare.

If not for the NDP's work, that program would not exist. It actually exists now. Thanks to the plan we put forward and forced the Liberals to implement, 600,000 Quebecers are now enrolled in the Canadian dental care plan. This program is not an intrusion at all. It does not interfere in Quebec's health care system. The federal government is not telling anyone how to run a hospital, a local community service centre or a long-term care home. All it is doing is making money available to pay the dentist.

Four million Quebecers do not have any public or private dental coverage, which has very serious consequences for their oral health as well as their overall health. I learned that heart surgery can be postponed if the surgeon feels as though the patient's oral health is not good enough, because the risk of bacterial and viral transmission is too high. That is a very real issue.

That is what we are trying to address, and it is becoming a reality. Contrary to the false statement that the Leader of the Opposition made earlier about how not a single tooth has been cleaned yet, since May 1, 90,000 people across Canada, including thousands of Quebecers, have had access to a dentist, either for free or with a reimbursement of 80% to 90% of the cost. That is a big deal.

● (1215)

Ten thousand dental care providers across the country have already signed up. The process will be even easier as of July 8, because they will not even have to sign up. They will be able to send the bill directly through the Sun Life portal. That will speed up the process and make it much simpler and easier for people to access dental care.

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We have learned that some of the 90,000 Canadians who have had access to dental care since May 1 have not seen a dentist in decades. This year, seniors in Quebec can have 80%, 90% or sometimes 100% of their dental care covered, depending on the fees. In June, teenagers aged 12 to 18, people under 18, will be able to apply for this new dental care program. That will bring major changes for families who pay for regular cleaning or extractions for their teenagers. Quebec families stand to save hundreds of dollars a year.

Starting in June, people with disabilities who receive federal tax credits will also be eligible to apply for the dental care program. This is revolutionary, and Quebec is not being told what to do or how to do it. Quebec does not have a dental care plan for seniors. There is no Quebec dental care plan for teenagers. There is also no plan for adults aged 18 to 64, who will be eligible to apply as early as next year.

What we also managed to get from the Liberals, with a great deal of effort and pressure, was the creation of a universal public pharmacare program. It is the best way to control and reduce the cost of drugs. All the studies and reports, including the 2019 Hoskins report, tell us that it needs to be done. The Quebec plan, which is a hybrid plan, was a step forward and real progress 30 years ago, but it is now outdated and we have lost control of the cost of drugs.

All the major unions in Quebec are telling us that we absolutely need a universal public single-payer system. We are laying the foundation for that with discussions with the provinces. Obviously, Quebec should have the right to opt out with compensation. The NDP thinks that this would be so beneficial that we need to continue these discussions, that we need to at least have these discussions in order to move forward.

The FTQ, the CSN and the CSQ, which represent 1.5 million workers in Quebec, are all saying that we must implement a pharmacare program to reduce costs, to greatly improve people's health, and also their financial situation, given that the rising cost of living is affecting everyone.

Dental care and pharmacare are cost-saving measures for workers, for employers, for Quebec's health care system. If people go to the dentist and get treated, if they can afford and receive the drugs that they need, they will be less sick. They will not end up in the emergency room, they will not end up in Quebec's health care system clogging up emergency rooms. It is a real and tangible way of improving people's lives.

I am very proud that the NDP had a hand in bringing about this program. It is thanks to our initiative and our pressure that this will become a reality. This is going to help every Quebecker who wants to have access to contraceptives. If these discussions and these negotiations with the provinces are successful, millions of people will have access to better control over their reproductive choices and their own body. For people with diabetes, having access to insulin, to the equipment, but also to all the equipment, will change things dramatically. We have to move forward, and I ask the Government of Quebec to be open to this.

Madam Speaker, I am presenting an amendment to the Bloc Québécois's supply day motion. It reads as follows:

That the motion be amended by (a) substituting the following for paragraph (a): “(a) reaffirm the principle of co-operative federalism, where Quebec is recognized as a nation within Canada and where the federal government must work with the provinces and territories in a way that respects the jurisdictions recognized in the Constitution”; (b) substituting paragraph (c) with the following: “(c) demand that the government work co-operatively with all levels of government to respond to the needs of citizens, while systematically offering Quebec the right to opt out unconditionally with full compensation whenever the federal government interferes in its jurisdiction”; (c) adding the following: “(d) recognize the fact that over 600,000 seniors in Quebec have already registered for the Canada dental care plan and the fact that the Centrale des syndicats démocratiques, the Confédération des syndicats nationaux, the Centrale des syndicats du Québec and the Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec welcome the development of a federal pharmacare program”.

• (1220)

Mr. Alain Therrien: Madam Speaker, we reject the amendment.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): It is my duty to inform hon. members that an amendment to an opposition motion may be moved only with the consent of the sponsor of the motion. If the sponsor is not present, the House leader, the deputy House leader, the whip or the deputy whip of the sponsor's party may give or refuse consent on the sponsor's behalf.

As I understand it, there is no consent.

Therefore, pursuant to Standing Order 85, the amendment cannot be moved at this time.

The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was very pleased to hear my colleague talk about the national dental care program.

They say that the federal government is interfering in an area under Quebec's jurisdiction, but many Quebeckers are benefiting or will benefit from this program.

What does the member think those Quebeckers would say if they were told they had to do without the program in order to protect provincial jurisdiction?

• (1225)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I held 26 town hall meetings in Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie to introduce the new dental care program. It was very well received. People who have not been able to afford a dentist for years have clearly seen that it could save them a lot of money and meet their needs.

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The beauty of this program is that it is a bill payment program, and bills are paid directly. It is a group public insurance program. We are not telling Quebec how to manage its health care system, but we are taking care of Quebecers.

Last week, when we had a constituency week, many seniors came to see me to thank us for our work, for doing this. These people have already been able to get teeth fixed and have seen how much it can make a difference in their lives. I look forward to that being the case for teenagers, people with disabilities and the general adult population.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to my colleague. However, I want to come back to the fact that the programs managed by Ottawa are completely ineffective.

There are many examples. From what I am hearing, the member wants us believe that everything is fine and that the federal government's programs will solve seniors' dental care problems. It is a mirage. That is what I believe and what I see, because the seniors who come to my office are more likely to complain about the fact that this is not working. That is why we are saying, let us simplify things and transfer the money to Quebec, which will make its own choices and help people.

Clearly, it is not working. Attempts to interfere result in duplication of services and additional delays. In the end, people do not get better services. They do not have that service and they have to wait. It is sad to see people continuing to suffer.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I hear what my colleague is saying, and I am not claiming that the program is perfect right out of the gate. It is something we are building. There will be ups and downs. Sometimes there are small adjustments to be made.

So far, 90,000 people have received treatment in three weeks already. That is 90,000 more people than a few months ago. Without the work of the NDP, all these people would not have had access to a dentist. I saw a bill from someone who posted it on social media. She had to pay \$10.71 when the bill was \$130, so she saved \$120. That is huge. People are going to be able to save hundreds of dollars a year, whether for prostheses or dentures.

I think the program will improve and become more effective. For now, it is not competing with the Quebec program, since Quebec does not offer such care for the elderly. There is no such program in Quebec. We are not going to wait for the CAQ to move if we are able to help people directly.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for consistently defending the interests of seniors, and particularly seniors in Quebec. It is a tremendous honour to be able to work with such a member, and I know that he often speaks about the importance of the care that seniors deserve. Would he elaborate on how life-changing this program would be for so many thousands of Qu b cois?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Edmonton Griesbach, and I salute his exceptional work in de-

fending the people of his riding and of the west, particularly Alberta.

These are indeed two programs that will change the lives of seniors, some of whom were suffering. Before the program was announced, a senior in my riding called my office every week to ask when she would finally have access to a dentist. She had infected gums from rotting teeth, which caused her pain and kept her up at night. Thanks to the program that has been set up, she is going to have access to a dentist. It is going to change her life.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is not easy to speak today after all my eloquent Bloc colleagues and before those who will speak after me.

My takeaway, so far, is this: The freer Quebec is, the better off it is. The federal system meddles in things that are none of its business. Year after year, budget after budget, the federal government keeps interfering in areas that do not come under its jurisdiction. It needs to stop. Interference causes delays, especially in Quebec, where everyone agrees that this spending power is illegitimate. The Bloc Qu b cois therefore demands that Quebec be given the right to opt out with full financial compensation, unconditionally and in every instance where Ottawa meddles in areas that are not its own.

I am going to attempt to once again explain what it is we are trying so hard to get people to understand. I will talk about the fact that Quebec is progressive, the failures of the federal system's meddling and, finally, the fiscal imbalance.

First, all of Quebec's major social and economic advances occurred after we withdrew from federal programs ill-suited to our needs or after we created programs that later, ironically, provided the inspiration for programs that the federal government then tried to impose on us.

By refusing to join the Canada pension plan, we were able to create the Caisse de d p t et placement du Qu bec, a powerful lever of economic development and modernization in Quebec. By withdrawing from the EI special benefits program, we were able to implement our own parental leave, which caused women's participation in the workforce to explode and paved the way for work-life balance. By withdrawing from the federal student loans program, we were able to implement a financial aid system that made Quebec the North American leader in access to education. By withdrawing from federal labour programs, we were able to implement an employment policy that brought together workers, employers and educational institutions to have training better meet the needs of the labour market.

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Now, I want to talk about some of the concerns. The latest example is the dental plan, which falls under Quebec's exclusive jurisdiction in health. Ottawa is taking on new power and choosing to give \$2 billion to Sun Life, a private company, to manage this plan. What is more, Ottawa is not harmonizing this plan with Quebec's public program, which already covers children. If the federal government chooses to introduce a pharmacare program, which also falls strictly under Quebec's jurisdiction, we can expect further centralization and a significant risk of it not being harmonized with Quebec's program. There is no shortage of examples of failed interference.

Last fall, the government introduced a bill to set up sector tables to discuss labour market training. Even though Quebec already has a system in place and is managing it, Ottawa is simply ignoring that fact and is proposing to duplicate the program without any harmonization or compensation. This is not an isolated case. Just look at financing for Quebec's provincial and municipal infrastructures; housing, where Ottawa is duplicating targeted, complex programs, creating a cumbersome and confusing situation that is delaying the completion of projects; or health. Ottawa introduced health initiatives in the last budget, but is offering no services. Meanwhile, the health care system is in crisis.

Here again, health transfers come to mind. They have increased six times less than expected and come with conditions that have led to a tug-of-war. As a result, the necessary money is slow in coming. In fact, it could be said that the decline in Quebec's autonomy and the erosion of Quebecers' ability to make their own choices is a strong trend. Even the Institute for Research on Public Policy, a Canada-wide research group based in Ottawa, concluded the same thing last June.

All this is taking place in a context where Ottawa is already doing a very poor job of managing the issues under its jurisdiction, multiplying its spending without seeking efficiency or results, and slashing its transfers to the provinces by multiplying conditions and delaying the payment of the promised amounts. The delays are just as unacceptable in the case of infrastructure or housing programs, where it takes years for an agreement to be reached and for the approved sums to be paid out, because here too, Ottawa is interfering.

In terms of the issues that I deal with as a critic, the government delayed getting money out to domestic violence shelters during the pandemic. What is more, despite our repeated requests, the government still refuses to increase OAS by 10% for seniors aged 65 to 74. Finally, as a third example, in my riding, the government is not contributing to a cost-shared infrastructure program for the construction of the Saint-Césaire arena. Inflation has driven up costs and the other two levels of government have done their part, but we have not heard from the federal government.

This is concrete evidence that the interference and incompetence of the federal government is delaying and even undermining our work.

Ottawa is doing this because it has the upper hand due to the persistent fiscal imbalance. In Canada, there is a serious fiscal imbalance to the detriment of Quebec and the provinces. Year after year, the Parliamentary Budget Officer keeps repeating in his fiscal sus-

tainability report that the provinces' finances are not sustainable over time.

There are three kinds of dysfunctions. First, by collecting more revenue than is necessary to meet its obligations, Ottawa is not making the effort to manage its administration effectively.

● (1230)

The federal government is notoriously ineffective. When Ottawa gets involved, everything costs more than it should.

Ottawa's continued interference is leading to an unprecedented centralization of power in the hands of the federal government. This weakens the people of Quebec's ability to develop in accordance with their needs, strengths, characteristics and desires. This centralization has been a trend for a long time, since Confederation. Since then, every Canadian government has been working to transform the federation into a legislative union, where Ottawa would reign supreme over the provinces and Quebec. Even under the Harper government, a Conservative government, centralization of power occurred, and that trend is ongoing. In Canada, there is no status quo. The third way, autonomy, that lies between our sovereignty and our assimilation and in which Quebec would be respected, is constantly under attack by the federal government, no matter which party is in power. The conclusion is that things are not working.

To put an end to interference means truly offering Quebec a right to opt out with full compensation and without condition from any new federal program that falls under the constitutional jurisdiction of the provinces. The government must immediately undertake negotiations with Quebec to implement this right to opt out of the dental care program and of the possible pharmacare program. It must undertake negotiations with the Government of Quebec to fully transfer to it the temporary foreign worker program, which would be a continuation of the federal government's withdrawal from Quebec's labour market sector, which first started in 1997. It must also systematically apply the principle of asymmetry in every federal transfer, in order to give more flexibility to the Government of Quebec, the cornerstone of a nation that enjoys the inherent right to self-determination. Finally, there needs to be a systematic review of federal programs with a view to determining which ones infringe on the jurisdictions of the provinces or overlap their programs in full or in part. Only Quebec still stands up to the federal government's interference.

When the federal government creates housing programs, it can easily impose them on the provinces, which just accept them and make their contribution. In Quebec, the federal government is barging in on an existing ecosystem, and that causes friction and keeps programs from starting up. After the national housing strategy was announced, it took more than three years for Quebec and Ottawa to come to an agreement. Recently, the federal government again refused to give \$900 million to Quebec without imposing any conditions on housing construction. It is hard to believe that negotiations will be streamlined and fast-tracked under a new federal department.

It is the same thing with infrastructure programs. The federal government wants to determine infrastructure priorities for Quebec and the municipalities, going so far as to interfere in matters as local as urban planning and the density of residential districts.

When the federal government announces a new infrastructure program with new conditions, it starts a tug-of-war with Quebec. Programs in Quebec start on average 18 months later than in the rest of Canada, where the government has free rein to take the lead in areas outside its jurisdiction.

In conclusion, one federal party after another has opted out of recognizing the Quebec nation and everything that implies. Even the Conservatives, who say they reject Pierre Elliott Trudeau's legacy, embrace Trudeau's principle of provincial equality. There is no special status; there is no right to opt out. Federal spending that encroaches on provincial jurisdiction negates the division of powers in Canada and erases Quebec's autonomy. There is no way for Quebec to end federal interference.

Federal interference proves that the fiscal imbalance has not been resolved. We know this because Ottawa has extra money to spend in areas under provincial jurisdiction. The fiscal imbalance will never be resolved without ending federal spending power in areas under the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces. Ottawa's conditional transfers and interference are undermining Quebec's autonomy.

The House of Commons recognizes the Quebec nation; everyone seems to be bragging about that today. However, recognizing the existence of a nation is more than symbolic. Just like individuals, nations have fundamental rights. The most fundamental of these rights is the right of a nation to control the social, economic and cultural development of its own society. It is the right to self-determination. We cannot, on the one hand, recognize that the Quebec nation exists and has the right to make choices that are different from those of Canada, and, on the other hand, deny that right by maintaining the federal government's spending power. In the end, the federal government's spending power is its very denial of the Quebec nation.

• (1235)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is somewhat sad that a political entity in the House would not support, for example, a senior who is on a fixed income and requires dental services having access to a national dental program. It is somewhat sad that some members would advocate that it is okay to leave a hungry child in a school setting because they do not support a national food program.

Would the member agree that sometimes we need to put the party aside in the best interest of the constituents we serve?

• (1240)

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, what is even sadder is that my colleague's only solution for seniors is the dental care plan. He did not talk at all about what his government is responsible for. Let us be clear. Old age security should be taken care of by

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his government, which increased the benefits by only 10%, and only for people aged 75 and over. I keep hearing about it every day. Seniors do not understand why his government, which is in charge of this program, has not taken care of people aged 65 to 74. They are falling through the cracks. They do not have more money in their pockets. That is what I do not understand and find very sad.

As for setting partisanship aside, I will say again that if something is good for Quebec, we will vote in favour of it, and if it is not good for Quebec, we will vote against it. My colleague from Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou has worked on the issue of food assistance for children.

Mr. Bernard G n reux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivi re-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a very simple question for my colleague. Our leader spoke about this earlier in his speech. The Bloc Qu b cois voted in favour of the budget allocations. We even heard the leader and some of his Bloc Qu b cois colleagues say that it was no big deal, that there is no time for that.

The Liberal Party of Canada's meddling in Quebec's jurisdictions has been apparent for a long time and these budget allocations are partly to blame.

Why did she vote for those?

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, here is a lesson in introductory politics and economics. Estimates and allocations, votes on budgets and votes on budgetary allocations are not the same thing. We oppose the Liberal government's really reckless, often ineffective and poorly targeted spending. We voted against the budget. That is how we have shown our opposition to this out-of-control spending.

Last week, in committee, I asked a question about another example of poorly targeted funding. On one hand, the federal government has hired more public servants, but on the other, it is using external consultants more, and that costs more. I was unable to get an answer about that in committee, by the way.

It is not in anyone's interest to make the system break down. That is the difference between budgetary allocations and the budget. Obviously, we are opposed to reckless spending, but we must also respect our institutions and those who work for government. It is not in anyone's interest to bring the system to a halt.

[English]

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will speak directly to the concern that the member raises, which is that of jurisdiction, and the real risk that is present to Qu b cois, which is the erasure of culture. It is ironic for me in many ways because there are more than two nations in Canada. The Bloc often speaks of just two nations. Turtle Island is founded on the diversity of many nations, of which I am a member in Alberta, particularly the Cree and the M tis.

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The member speaks about freedom and self-determination for Québécois, but we just recently heard that first nations there were concerned about the erasure of their own culture.

How does the member reconcile the very real difficulty between the self-determination of Québécois and the self-determination of indigenous people in Quebec?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Madam Speaker, we have always advocated for nation-to-nation dialogue in Quebec with indigenous peoples. Here is another example of what is not working. The federal government is responsible for housing, especially in indigenous communities. We looked at this in committee, and right now, not enough investments are being made in housing for indigenous women and indigenous people.

Rather than investing in areas that fall under Quebec's jurisdiction, the federal government should look after its own affairs.

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens (Beauport—C te-de-Beaupr — le d'Orl ans—Charlevoix, BQ): Madam Speaker, I hope you found some spruce gum.

I have been wondering what approach I should take for this speech. There is so much to say, yet at the same time, so little. I can boil it down to a very apt phrase my grandmother used to say to me when I was little and wanted to play with the pie dough while she cooked for dozens of guests. This saying applies to all kinds of situations, especially when we look at the multiple instances of federal meddling in Quebec's jurisdictions: in all circumstances, if we cannot be helpful, we should refrain from doing harm.

I could stop there.

Federalism, by definition, is about pooling some of our resources, establishing priorities and areas where it will be good to do things collectively, identifying what might be advantageous to pay for together and then letting everyone do what they want with the rest of their resources. Quebec has the data, the institutions and the intellectual and organizational capacity to do it best.

The purpose of federalism is not to impoverish the members that make up the whole. However, it is quite the contrary here in Canada. It does not matter which political party is in charge. This happens under every government, with the aim of dominating the provinces, intruding into everything, spending outrageously, duplicating spending, and demanding more and more in exchange. The proof is that everything keeps getting worse. In the history of Canadian federalism, we have never seen so many conditions attached to such meagre proposals.

My colleagues across the way would have me believe that, in Quebec, it is only normal that no one cares about where the money comes from, that the important thing is that the money arrives. To all those who believe that myth, I am sorry, but that does not fly in Quebec.

Why would the federal government change its methods? Ottawa keeps the upper hand by maintaining the fiscal imbalance. That is its self-maintaining power. In a federation, there is a fiscal imbalance when one level of government collects more taxes than it needs to fulfill its constitutional responsibilities, while the other

level of government struggles to fund its own areas of responsibility independently because it is underfunded.

There is a serious fiscal imbalance in Canada at the expense of Quebec and the provinces. It is recognized, and it has been studied and analyzed. The Parliamentary Budget Officer repeats this year after year in his report on the fiscal sustainability of the provinces. At the end of the day, the provinces' finances are not sustainable. As time goes on, the federal government is getting more and more leeway to interfere, because Quebec and the provinces become so financially vulnerable that they are prepared to accept any crumbs rather than have nothing. That is the worst thing. They are forced to give in through deprivation. It is despicable.

Take health care, for example. The federal government funds a meagre 23% of provincial health care spending. Its constitutional obligation says it could go as high as 50%. The premiers presented a united front and asked for 35%. That would have meant about \$6 billion a year for Quebec. Quebec was told that it would receive \$900 million a year, but it is still waiting on that.

Had the federal government fulfilled its yearly obligation to provide the provinces with adequate health care funding, their balance sheet would look very different. We would not be arguing about dental insurance. We would just have it, like we have pharmacare. The issue is not that we do not want dental insurance. The issue is that the federal government is not delivering on its responsibilities. It is not funding provincial health care systems adequately, and the provinces are being forced to accept anything rather than nothing at all. That is how we wound up where we are today. Then the government swoops in like Robin Hood to save the day. After starving people, it throws a few bucks their way to placate them.

Even under the Harper government, there was centralization of power. There is no status quo in Canada. The middle ground between sovereignty and assimilation, respect for Quebec's autonomy, has always been under attack by every federal party that has ever held power. Quebecers have a natural, organic, creative impulse that has always driven the unconventional development of our society and kept it ahead of the curve. My background is in entrepreneurship in the regions. We know from hard work, resourcefulness, rational thinking and organizing for efficiency in the regions.

● (1245)

That was probably what struck me most when I arrived here in the House. I wondered where I had landed. There was talk about a lot of things that already exist in Quebec. When the rest of Canada wants child care centres and pharmacare like Quebec has, why can the federal government not recognize Quebec's progress and simply give it back its share of the tax contribution, unconditionally? Quebec can simply say no thank you, we already have all that, we want our share and we will determine where to invest that money appropriately, based on where we are at.

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No, they do not want to give us that. They want us to calm down, not get carried away and wait patiently. They want us to pay twice for things we already have, for redundancies that muddy our system and seriously bog down all our incredible, ingenious initiatives that have always been our signature and our strength. We are herded like sheep, sending in our share of the money to be spent as the feds see fit. When it suits them, they send us a little money, just to keep us quiet.

On this opposition day—and I find these words to be particularly meaningful—we are saying that, for us, depending on a machine that is adding layers of red tape to increase its authority to decide our future with our own money is unacceptable. We Quebecers are capable of conceiving, building and shaping our society ourselves. The proof is that, despite the many restrictions created in large part by the centralization imposed by the federal government, Quebec has nevertheless managed to provide more social services and win more economic victories over the years than many countries in the world, and that will continue. It will continue because that is who we are as Quebecers. In Quebec, we speak French and we are close-knit. We support one another and we protect what we have. Our future is green and sustainable, and we are moving towards it with ingenuity and creativity.

Honestly, being dependent on a federalism that is caught up in its own areas of jurisdiction and feeds its own centralizing habits to excess makes us all the more eager to become independent. The Bloc Québécois is here for just that reason, to stop the federal government from constantly putting things in place to try to keep Quebec in line. The federal government is interfering in our economy, our resources, our public services, our values and our language.

For Quebec, that is unacceptable.

• (1250)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, much like the Province of Saskatchewan played a very important role in the creation of the Canada Health Act and our national health care system, the Province of Quebec played a very important role in the national child care program we have today and the legislation that was ultimately put in place. That is one of the nice things about the federation. I think about the individuals who would be helped in all regions of the country through the national dental care program and the national food program for children.

I am wondering why some members in the chamber do not see fit to support those programs, which would help real people, real children and real seniors on fixed incomes. Why would the member not recognize that?

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Madam Speaker, this goes back to what I was saying earlier: The federal government starves the provinces, it starves Quebec, it underfunds it, and then it comes along like a hero and claims to be nice and kind by finally giving us a few crumbs. The federal government is making seniors poorer. It is leaving the health care system worse off. Think of housing, too. Instead of giving the money to Quebec, which knows perfectly well what to do in its own jurisdictions, the federal government would

rather take the money away and impose conditions for writing a cheque, when Quebec is fully competent and capable of doing all this itself.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am going to put a question to my colleague, who lives just across the water from me, on the other side of the St. Lawrence River. We live in an absolutely extraordinary and exceptionally beautiful province. Isle-aux-Coudres, where my colleague lives, is a phenomenal place. It is right across from where I live. In fact, I jokingly tell her that I watch her with my telescope. I do not, of course.

I have a very simple question for my colleague, for whom I have the utmost respect and who has an extraordinary voice. Quebec sovereignty, if it ever happens, will happen in Quebec City, not in Ottawa. For more than 30 years now, the Bloc Québécois has been complaining about what the federal government does or does not do with regard to Quebec's needs, even though it knows that the work is going to be done in Quebec City.

Why does she come sit here in the House and see herself as being in another country? Her salary is paid by all Canadians, but she says she lives in another country. I would like her to just answer my question. Why is she here?

• (1255)

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Madam Speaker, this is a good opportunity to remind my colleague that, like him, more than 18,000 people democratically placed their trust in me and my voice to represent their interests and convictions and, above all, to exercise extreme vigilance when it comes to federal government manipulation in Quebec's intrusions, among other things. We, the 32 members of the Bloc Québécois, were given this mandate because members of the other parties who are from Quebec failed at the task. That is why I am sitting here, and I am proud of it. When I leave, I am going to buy my chair.

[English]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Madam Speaker, listening to the member's response on dental care, it feels like sometimes the Bloc is working for François Legault instead of working for Quebecers. Fifty per cent of Quebecers do not have dental coverage. I am curious how the member would respond to the Quebecers who are enthusiastic about dental care, the 600,000 of them who have already registered for the program.

[Translation]

Mrs. Caroline Desbiens: Madam Speaker, we share a certain affinity in our way of seeing society. The NDP's values occasionally intersect with ours. On certain matters, however, we have a very hard time seeing eye to eye. We often see the NDP, at the risk of being inconsistent, abandon its values to align itself with a government so it can say that it came up with a certain idea or that it is the one changing people's lives.

In reality, these are palliative measures. The NDP government's proposals are palliative proposals. What we want is to create an economically healthy Quebec, and that will require the unconditional health transfers that Quebec is owed.

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Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first of all, I would like to say that I will be sharing my time with the member for Nepean.

I will begin my remarks by saying that it pains me to see the Bloc and the Conservatives arguing, when they are often on the same wavelength.

Getting to the substance of my speech, I would like to examine the assumptions underlying this motion. The first is that the federal government is some kind of centralizing monster that is trying to stifle Quebecers' aspirations. We have been hearing this narrative for as long as I can remember.

I will provide some concrete examples to illustrate that the federal government does not want to manage everything, whenever possible, even when it comes to its own jurisdictions. It prefers to delegate responsibilities to the provinces so that they can manage their own affairs, even if it is a federal jurisdiction.

Let us consider the Fisheries Act. It is clearly a federal statute under the Constitution of Canada. The federal government signed an equivalency agreement with Quebec to enable the province to implement this act and its regulations.

The Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act is my second example. People had doubts about whether the federal government had jurisdiction in this matter. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ruled that putting a price on greenhouse gas pollution did in fact fall within the jurisdiction of the federal government. The federal government did not say that it wanted this legislation to apply to all the provinces in order to interfere with the provinces and administer this legislation. The federal government simply said that if a province had an equivalent system, as Quebec and British Columbia do, then that province's system would apply. This is a second example of how the federal government does not want to get involved in everything.

Often, even when it comes to its own jurisdiction, the federal government does not want to get involved and would rather delegate responsibility to the provinces. Immigration is another example of this. Prime Minister Mulroney was a close friend of the member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix. After his passing, she spoke eloquently about his friendship. She used to sing for him and his family. It was very touching. Prime Minister Mulroney signed an agreement with Quebec to allow it to decide who would be a permanent resident in the province of Quebec.

Yes, some things are centralized. Some things are centralized, but they are centralized for practical and technological reasons. For example, it is nice outside today. Let us talk about the weather. The federal government handles the weather, because technologically speaking, weather forecasts are quite complex. They require extremely sophisticated systems. So the federal government is in charge of that, but it is not centralized to stifle Quebecers' aspirations. It comes down to practicality. It is better to centralize it than have the provinces operate their own weather forecasting systems.

Another example is communications. Canada does not have a very big population. We have about 40 million people. That is about the same population as California. I do not know what the

population of New York or Florida is. There are not many of us, and we are up against web giants, big companies with enormous financial and technological power.

● (1300)

In Canada, we counterbalance that power with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, or CRTC. It tries to protect the cultural interests of Quebec and the rest of Canada by opposing the web giants, in certain situations at least. Many examples show that centralization is not a bad thing. There are other examples where we can see quite clearly that the federal government prefers to have certain files handled by the provinces, even though they fall under its jurisdiction.

I would also like to refer to point (b) of the motion, where it is requested that the House “remind the Prime Minister that, despite his claims, it is not true that ‘people do not care which level of government is responsible for what’”.

This observation is not very nuanced, and, in response, I would say that it is true in some cases but not in others. When it comes to primary and secondary education, Quebecers and the citizens of the other provinces are adamant that the federal government should stay out of it. The federal government does not want to get involved. There are no issues there.

People also assume that post-secondary education is a provincial matter, but let us consider what the Government of Quebec is doing to Concordia University and McGill University. Quebec's CAQ government is chipping away at McGill University, which is ranked 28th in the world. It is a proudly québécois university that many French-speaking Quebecers attend. If people knew about what is happening between McGill and the Government of Quebec, I think they would ask the federal government to interfere—to interfere financially, I dare say. They would ask the federal government to inject funds to bridge the massive gap. I would have said “make up the shortfall”, but the provincial government really is creating a massive gap.

I think that the business community, especially the high-tech community, would ask the federal government to interfere financially because these sectors depend on research to move forward. Quebec's prosperity depends heavily on the health of the tech sector. Furthermore, we know that Quebec's business community has concerns about the labour supply.

I would now like to talk about the pandemic. What happened during the pandemic? The federal government used its spending power to provide what amounted to social assistance to many Canadians and, by the way, to many businesses. Billions and billions of dollars were paid out. There were no complaints back then. Mr. Legault's government was not complaining about federal government interference.

There was no complaining at the time, and I am not hearing any complaints from Quebecers about the national dental care program. It is true, in some cases, that Quebecers are hell-bent on protecting provincial jurisdiction, but in other cases, they want their interests to come first and their needs to be addressed.

Business of Supply

• (1305)

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech, and I especially thank him for putting something into each sentence of his speech that would provoke questions or reactions from me and other members from the Bloc Québécois. I would need 15 minutes to ask all my questions and challenge my colleague on some of his claims, but I will try to be more constructive.

First, I would tell him that 82% of Quebecers who were polled in March want the federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictions to be respected. Whether it is about health care or anything else, 82% say that everybody should mind their own business. That is clear.

I particularly liked the example my colleague gave about the success of centralization when he mentioned the CRTC. This example is of particular interest to me because, first of all, I worked closely with the government to improve the Broadcasting Act with Bill C-11, and because I am a strong supporter of culture, language and all that.

However, I was taken aback to hear the CRTC characterized as a centralization success story. Without the intervention of the Bloc Québécois, almost no protections for francophone culture and Quebec broadcasters would have been included in Bill C-11, which the CRTC is currently looking at.

I would like my colleague to tell us what he thinks of the idea that the Bloc Québécois has been promoting for years: to create what would essentially be a Quebec version of the CRTC to manage more to benefit—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Madam Speaker, I am familiar with that idea. I heard those arguments when we were debating Bill C-11, but I truly believe that there are advantages to having the provinces, the Quebec nation, first nations and every other group of Canadians work together to act as a counterbalance to this power south of the border that I am just as wary of as the member. It takes a counterbalance. If we are divided in 10, each with their own communications regulator, I think that will weaken us in the long term. Honestly, I very sincerely believe that.

• (1310)

[English]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Madam Speaker, Toronto is a big city. Montreal is a global city; I think this fact certainly offends many in the Bloc and certain independentists in Quebec, who are constantly undermining Montreal's position. My colleague talked about McGill, which is a world-class university. McGill draws people from around the world to Montreal, not only because of its culture but also because it is an education centre. However, we see McGill having to go to court to defend the right of students to be educated, to challenge the unconstitutional attack on a world-class institution.

What does my colleague think about a government that attacks an institution that is this respected around the world just for partisan points to please the sovereigntists?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Madam Speaker, the member has touched on something I care deeply about. With a few others, I met the president of McGill, Deep Saini, yesterday. I thought I knew how badly McGill is being treated by the Quebec government. I did not know the half of it until I really saw the facts. It is the 28th-best university in the world. Its graduates have gone on to create companies such as Intel. What is good for McGill is good for Quebec in many ways. It is good for the Quebec economy and Quebec culture.

I am quite offended by the fact that the provincial government of Quebec is undermining the province and all its citizens; it does not really matter whether they are French speakers or English speakers. It is undermining the province by targeting two institutions such as McGill and Concordia. I think it is a shame.

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to take part in today's debate. I will get straight to the point. Criticizing the federal government's "interference" in provincial and territorial jurisdiction is not only deeply flawed but also quite unfair. It overlooks the collaborative nature of Canada's federal system. By working together, both levels of the government can address complex issues that transcend regional boundaries, fostering a more cohesive and prosperous nation.

In reality, Canada's unique federal structure grants provinces and territories more autonomy to implement programs and policies tailored to their residents while also providing a platform to showcase their strengths on the global stage. This creates a win-win situation, enabling Canadians, including Quebecers, to enjoy numerous social and economic benefits unparalleled elsewhere.

Let me briefly touch on Quebec's unique identity within Canada, which is defined by its rich cultural heritage, distinct language, legal system and historical significance. These elements contribute to Quebec's special status and influence its interaction within the Canadian federation.

Quebec boasts a vibrant and distinct cultural scene deeply rooted in its French heritage. The province is known for its contributions to literature, music, theatre, cinema and visual arts. Annual events such as the Montreal international jazz festival and the Quebec Winter Carnival celebrate Québécois culture and attract visitors from around the world. The preservation of French culture is central to Quebec's identity and influences its social and political life.

Quebec's legal system is based on civil law inherited from the French Napoleonic Code, unlike the rest of Canada, which follows the common law system. This difference underscores Quebec's unique legal traditions and governance structures, affecting everything from property rights to family law. Quebec has a distinct historical trajectory within Canada. Quebec has a strong sense of political autonomy. The province has its own immigration policies and pension plan.

Business of Supply

Quebec's education system reflects its unique identity with a distinct structure and curriculum that emphasizes French language and Québécois culture. Institutions like Université de Montréal and Université Laval are key cultural and educational pillars that foster a strong sense of provincial identity.

Quebec plays a vital role in Canada's economy, with strengths in sectors like aerospace, information technology, biotechnology and energy. The province's economic policies often reflect its unique priorities, including the promotion of French-language businesses and industries.

Quebec is known for its progressive social policies, including affordable child care, generous parental leave and robust public health care. These policies reflect the province's commitment to social welfare and contribute to its distinct social fabric.

Quebec's unique identity is a source of pride for its residents and adds to the diversity and richness of the Canadian federation. Balancing this distinctiveness with its role within Canada continues to shape Quebec's social, cultural and political landscape.

While certain sectors are primarily under provincial jurisdiction in Canada, the federal government can play and has played a significant role in supporting these areas through various mechanisms. The federal government provides financial support to provinces through transfer payments such as the Canada health transfer and the Canada social transfer. These funds help provinces deliver essential services like health care, post-secondary education and social services. Additionally, equalization payments ensure that all provinces, including Quebec, have comparable levels of public services despite differences in revenue-generating capacities.

The federal government can establish national standards and guidelines to promote consistency and quality across the country. For example, through the Canada Health Act, the federal government sets principles for health care delivery. The federal government can initiate and has initiated targeted funding programs to address specific needs. For example, it has invested in infrastructure projects like highways and public transit systems, thus enhancing transportation networks. It has also funded education initiatives such as skills training and research grants to bolster provincial education systems.

• (1315)

Federal and provincial governments, including Quebec, can collaborate and have done so, through intergovernmental agreements. These agreements facilitate joint efforts on shared priorities such as improving health care delivery, addressing climate change and enhancing economic development.

The federal government can support provinces, including Quebec, by conducting research and sharing data that inform policy decisions. Federal agencies and institutions can provide valuable insights into best practices and emerging trends, helping provinces design effective programs. By leveraging available mechanisms, the federal government has complemented provincial efforts, including Quebec's, ensuring that Canadians have access to high-quality services regardless of where they live.

With respect to affordability, Canadians in every region and of all ages benefit from the federal government's fiscally responsible and people-driven economic plan. The Canada-wide early learning and child care plan is a great example of collaboration between the federal government and the provinces. We are strengthening the affordable child care system already in place in Quebec by helping to create more child care spaces. We are also supporting about 3.5 million families across Canada annually through the tax-free Canada child benefit. We will continue to work with provinces as we launch a national school food program.

We have increased old age security benefits for seniors aged 75 and older by 10%. We also delivered the first enhanced quarterly Canada workers' benefit payments to our lowest-paid and often most essential workers, with a family receiving a total benefit of up to \$2,616 last year. Our new Canada disability benefit would increase the financial well-being of low-income Canadians with disabilities in every region of the country.

On top of the laundry list of measures I just mentioned, we are also working with provinces to deliver improved health care to Canadians. Last year, we committed nearly \$200 billion over 10 years to strengthen public health care for Canadians, including record health transfers and tailored bilateral agreements. This year, we introduced legislation to launch the first phase of national universal pharmacare in Canada, which would provide universal single-payer coverage for a number of contraception and diabetes medications. We are, of course, making historic investments in affordable dental care, which is essential not only for oral health but also for overall health.

Thanks to the federal government's efforts to work with provinces to build more housing faster across Canada, together we are on track to build nearly four million homes by the end of 2031.

We have been steadfast in our efforts to collaborate with provinces and territories to build a better and fairer Canada, and these efforts have indeed borne fruit. However, it is crucial that we maintain the momentum. By continuing to work with our partners at all levels of government, we can drive our economy towards inclusive growth and ensure that the promise of Canada remains attainable for everyone. Therefore, I urge hon. members to reject today's misguided motion.

Business of Supply

• (1320)

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, what I notice, when I hear the member's comments, is that there is a lack of understanding and a lack of a desire to fully understand the reality of Quebec, which is perhaps a society where the need for this sort of respect for jurisdictions is felt even more strongly.

I understand the reality of my colleague, who lives in a multicultural environment, where people are not as bothered by the federal government sticking its nose in everywhere. In Quebec, however, the reality is different. What I see is that my colleague does not seem to understand or grasp the distinct nature of the Quebec nation.

In terms of the federal government's responsibility for health care, for example, the problem is that the federal government is not fulfilling its obligations, which are to transfer money to Quebec and the provinces for the management of their health care systems. This failure to live up to its obligations is creating the problems that Quebec and the provinces are experiencing with their health care systems, and this is preventing them from being able to resolve them. The federal government comes clomping in with its big boots, saying it is going to interfere in the province's areas of jurisdiction and solve its problems.

I would like to hear from my colleague on this subject, but I would especially like him to reassure me that he does understand the distinct nature of Quebec and certain other regions of Canada that are not necessarily as multicultural as Canada as a whole.

[English]

Mr. Chandra Arya: Madam Speaker, I think the hon. member does not seem to understand that the Canadian federal system is collaborative in nature. He talked about health care, but in the last speech by one of his colleagues I did not see him react to the question posed by an NDP member about the 600,000 Quebecers who have registered for the Canada dental care plan. It is not just a question of jurisdiction; what is important is that the affordability issues faced by Canadians should be addressed by all levels of government working collaboratively.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague, and I know that he has a lot of knowledge about economic development and what is happening in the different provinces, particularly in Quebec, around a clean economy and the kind of innovation that we need in order to work toward a better, carbon-free future.

We know there have been historic investments made in Quebec by Northvolt and in other industries. My question for the member is this: What would happen if the federal government did not make these investments?

Mr. Chandra Arya: Madam Speaker, indeed Canada is at the forefront of many advanced technologies, like artificial intelligence. Indeed Quebec is quite strong when it comes to the clean economy and knowledge-based industries, especially in artificial intelligence. Quebec is also good in aerospace and other allied industries.

However, all these industries are on the global stage because of the active involvement of the federal government over a period of time. Without the federal government's investments in these advanced technologies, Quebec would not have attained the position it has, and without continued investments by the federal government, Quebec would not reach the stage where we would see Canada and Quebec's technologies at the forefront of the global knowledge-based economy.

• (1325)

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have the honour of warming up the crowd for my colleague from Terrebonne. I am pleased to do that.

I listened to a number of the speeches that were given by my colleagues before me. I would like to reread the text of the motion because, obviously, we are going to be talking about it all day. It states, and I quote:

That the House:

(a) condemn the federal government's repeated intrusion into the exclusive jurisdictions of Quebec, the provinces and the territories;

(b) remind the Prime Minister that, despite his claims, it is not true that "people do not care which level of government is responsible for what"; and

(c) demand that the government systematically offer Quebec, the provinces and territories the right to opt out unconditionally with full compensation whenever the federal government interferes in their jurisdictions.

The last sentence is a bit contradictory because the federal government should never interfere in the jurisdictions of Quebec, the provinces and the territories.

I want to come back to paragraph (b) of our motion today, because earlier, the member for Lac-Saint-Louis referred to it and implied that it was a bit ridiculous. I want to reiterate the part in quotation marks, which states, "people do not care which level of government is responsible for what". We did not pull that out of thin air. The Prime Minister himself is the one who said that. Members are calling into question the fact that that is not true, but 82% of Quebecers who were polled in March said that they were concerned about respect for federal, provincial—in this case Quebec—and municipal jurisdictions. That is important. That means that people do care, to use the words of the Prime Minister.

Nothing annoys me more than someone who does not mind their own business and comes in and does something that is someone else's responsibility just so they can take credit for it. Imagine if today I decided to recognize a member rising on a point of order. You would tell me to sit down in short order, Madam Speaker, and rightly so. That is how Quebecers feel when the federal government barges in on our jurisdictions. This tension between the federal government and Quebec over respect for jurisdictions is nothing new, and it is not just a matter of sovereignists trying to pick a fight. Robert Bourassa complained about it. Was there anyone more federalist and Liberal than him in Quebec provincial politics?

Business of Supply

Federal interference is seen not only as a violation of Quebec's and the provinces' autonomy, but also as an obstacle to the development and vitality of the Quebec nation. Nearly all successive governments in the National Assembly have felt that way. I repeat: 82% of Quebecers believe that the federal government should mind its own business. Elected officials are not the only ones who think so.

When we ask the government to mind its own business, it should start by doing what it is expected to do properly. For example, it should find out where taxpayers' money is going before it realizes that \$1 billion has been wasted on consultants or small businesses that are not always competent and that are hired to do things like create an app to manage incoming travellers at the border during a pandemic. That is just an example, of course.

Minding its own business also means fixing the Phoenix fiasco. Even today, we members—I am not the only one—still have to help our constituents, who are often owed tens of thousands of dollars by the government. They live in the kind of hardship we would not wish on anyone, and which is certainly undeserved, given the efforts they have put into saving for retirement all their lives. They come to our offices because the government still owes them \$30,000, \$40,000 or \$50,000 because of the problems with Phoenix, which it is unable to solve.

Minding its own business also means not trying to impose conditions on health transfers to Quebec and the provinces, because the federal government knows nothing about Quebec's health care system. In fact, by not contributing to the health care system in Quebec and the provinces, it has contributed to the health care disaster we are currently experiencing. Now, I am certain I am going to hear the NDP and the Liberals stand up and say that 600,000 Quebecers are happy to have a dental plan. However, if the federal government had transferred adequate amounts to Quebec and the provinces over the years so they could fund their health care systems, and if Quebecers wanted a dental plan that covered everyone, we would have the means to afford it, just as we have introduced pharmacare and child care. We are capable of creating social programs that reflect the richness of the Quebec nation and its values.

• (1330)

Minding its own business also means no longer pretending to care about seniors. I know I am hitting a nerve with my colleague from Shefford. People aged 65 to 74 are being left to suffer in poverty because the federal government does not want to include them in its plan to increase old age pensions. It is completely ridiculous, inexplicable and inexcusable. Not a week goes by that I do not receive emails and calls from my constituents aged 65 to 74, who are wondering what is going on. They are wondering if they are going to get the increase. The answer is no.

The Bloc Québécois continues to work on this issue. Seniors aged 65 to 74 can rest assured that we will always be on their side.

We will also be there for people aged 75 and over in order to ensure fairness. We do not want two classes of seniors. If the federal government would mind its own business and look after its own affairs like everyone else does, we would not be in this situation.

Minding its own business also means no longer pretending to care about defending French, considering the members opposite want to challenge Bill 96, a law that was democratically passed by the National Assembly of Quebec, which knows better than Ottawa how to counter the decline of French in Quebec, in Canada and even in North America. Quebec is the last francophone bastion in North America; it is the cradle of French culture and the French language. No one knows better than Quebec how to defend the French language and reverse its decline.

The concept of federal, provincial and municipal jurisdictions is taught in Quebec schools in grade 10. This means that in Quebec, 14- and 15-year-old students know what falls under federal jurisdiction, what falls under Quebec's jurisdiction, and what falls under municipal jurisdiction. They learn this at school when they are 14 or 15 years old. These young people learn that and take an interest in politics for a little while. They look at what is going on, and then they see that the Parliament in Ottawa is completely out in left field. It is not minding its own business at all. They scratch their heads and wonder why adults who have been elected to Parliament do not even know something they just learned at school at the age of 14.

There is an explanation for that. For some time now, we have been witnessing the exploitation of people's ignorance. The public is being bombarded with insipid, meaningless slogans. Crass disinformation is being propagated left and right—mostly from the right—but we see that it is working. People swallow it without asking too many questions. This is sad and dangerous for democracy.

One of the teachings of Socrates—this is going to make me sound learned—says that a democracy can only work if the people are educated. These are worrying times where politicians are exploiting ignorance rather than contributing to building a better-informed society and citizens capable of critical thinking. As parliamentarians, we have a duty to do the right thing, to respect the institutions, to respect our duty to our constituents. That means respecting the powers of each level of government and the fact that each level of government must do its job properly.

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

I would like to ask him a question that I have already asked. I would like to hear his comments.

Does he think that the members of the Bloc Québécois, who surely represent their constituents, represent the Government of Quebec?

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the question from my colleague from Châteauguay—Lacolle.

Business of Supply

If she follows the workings of the House a bit—and I am sure she does so diligently—she knows very well that the Bloc Québécois represents the Quebec National Assembly, the elected representatives of the people of Quebec and, ideally, the consensus of the National Assembly. Above all, we respect, first and foremost, the decisions that are made in Quebec's National Assembly, because that is what best represents the interests of Quebeckers.

• (1335)

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Drummond for warming up the room. It feels like enthusiasm for respecting jurisdictions has reached a fever pitch.

I have a question for him about the legitimacy of the Liberal government's intrusion into Quebec's jurisdictions, knowing that it received a minority mandate.

I would like my colleague to say a few words about that.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Madam Speaker, I hope I have 15 minutes to answer the question asked by my colleague from Terrebonne, because I have a lot to say on the matter.

It is disturbing to see that a government given a minority mandate by the people, instead of respecting the will of the people, would sidle up to another opposition party and govern as a majority government would, with policies and legislation that, perhaps well-intentioned, nevertheless violate certain principles, including respect for the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces.

No, I do not think the government has the legitimacy to govern as it is governing.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Madam Speaker, on Monday, we celebrated National Patriots Day. Our patriots fought and were sometimes exiled or even hanged for defending Quebeckers' right to manage their own affairs.

In 1838, following the patriots' rebellion, Quebec lay in ruins. As the fires of British repression raged, one thought prevailed: How do we rid ourselves of these darn francophones who refuse to bow down to Queen Victoria and the interests of the British businessmen who dominate the colony? What can we do to create a dominion loyal to the British Empire and stop Quebeckers from rebelling again?

The solution was obvious: Announce the creation of a confederation. In a confederation, the provinces have most of the power. Quebeckers can govern themselves in peace without too much interference. Later, we can impose a federation on them without asking their opinion. Boom! Just like that, the Canadian federation was born, with a nice lie at the starting gate so the francophones would no longer rise up.

In English Canada, however, the measure did not meet with unanimous approval. Why make concessions to the losers? The Constitution of 1867 was therefore based on a lie designed to reconcile the irreconcilable: on the one hand, the Quebec people's desire for self-determination, and on the other, the desire for unity of the citizens of British origin. The whole history of the federal system is there, a tug-of-war between those who believe the real power is in Quebec and those who believe the real power is in Ottawa.

It is ironic that I, a separatist MP, have to remind the House yet again of how the Canadian Constitution works, whereas the government never misses an opportunity to remind us that the Constitution should not be touched and to say that all the issues related to it do not matter to Canadians and Quebeckers or that Quebeckers do not care about jurisdictions.

It is all the more ironic given that the Constitution I am talking about is the one that was imposed in secret by the father of the current Prime Minister, during the night of the long knives in 1882. Since then, the Liberal Party's tendency has grown stronger. Increasingly, English-speaking Canada wants Ottawa to be its real government, the one that manages the bulk of public services. Conversely, Quebec has made a different choice. All the polls show it, as my colleagues have pointed out. When Quebeckers are asked whether Quebec or Ottawa should manage each area of jurisdiction in isolation, they overwhelmingly answer Quebec, every time.

Many of the measures presented in the latest budget, for example, have noble objectives: to take care of people affected by the difficult economic conditions we face today. The problem is that these measures do not reflect the different realities. I do not think I am teaching my colleagues anything when I say that Canada, in its current state, is quite diverse. Realities are very different in Quebec and in Alberta, for example.

However, with all the good faith in the world, it was inevitable that, without prior consultation with the provinces, the programs would be ill adapted. Health and housing are not federal responsibilities. The House of Commons has no business touching those things. Why? Because Quebeckers believe their real government is in Quebec City. As long as that is the case, the concept of the fiscal imbalance will persist. By fiscal imbalance, I mean the fact that the provinces have insufficient financial means to fulfill their own responsibilities, while the federal government could, if it wished, record surpluses—we do not know how it manages to run a deficit—to fulfill the responsibilities that flow from its jurisdictions. Bernard Landry once said that the needs are in the provinces, but the money is in Ottawa.

Although the federal government tries to deny its existence, the fiscal imbalance is a well-known concept and a major issue that has been recognized since the 1990s. As the population ages, the cost of Quebec's social programs is rising rapidly. The Government of Quebec alone should determine where social program funds should go. Since Quebec is systematically underfunded, we might wonder, and we often do, whether the Liberal Party believes a Quebecker is worth less than a Canadian.

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The Government of Quebec is shouting itself hoarse asking for health transfers. What does the federal government have to say in response? It responds with even more intrusions into Quebec's areas of jurisdiction. In the specific case of the dental insurance program we are talking about today, it is an intrusion into a program already covered by the Quebec health insurance plan. Yes, I would like to remind my friends in the NDP that the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec is a public body with no plans to make money off taxpayers, as the federal government's dental care program would do. If the proposed dental cheques policy is so bad, it is because the government still stubbornly refuses to consult Quebec and the provinces when designing its programs.

● (1340)

What is more, because of Quebec's progressive labour code, the rate of unionization and group insurance is higher in Quebec than anywhere else in North America, making workers ineligible for the federal programs. It is always Quebec that pays for the federal government's slowness, because it created a good social safety net for itself long before the federal government thought of doing it.

Why can the federal government not help itself from intruding where it does not belong when it cannot even take care of its own responsibilities properly? I have a theory. I think it wants to kill the concept of fiscal imbalance. It is simple: Instead of fixing it, the government will make it disappear. Think about it. Instead of sending health transfers to the provinces or giving Quebec the right to opt out with full compensation, it creates a unitary government where there is no longer a division of powers. By gradually eroding the powers of the provinces, it will do away with the concept of the fiscal imbalance, where the needs are in the provinces but the money is in Ottawa. The fiscal imbalance is not fixed, but it no longer exists.

However, if the federal government wants to convince the public that it is capable of becoming a unitary state with sweeping powers, perhaps it should start by showing that it is capable of at least looking after its own areas of jurisdiction, the things that are truly its responsibility. Do I need to mention again, as I have done on many occasions in the House, ArriveCAN or the billions of dollars that, for years, have been going to companies that deliver no services except those they subcontract out with very high commissions?

Once again, we learn something new every week. Instead of cleaning up its own agencies, the federal government is promoting employees who openly broke the code of conduct. Employees who went out for drinks and dinner with GC Strategies got promoted. That is outrageous. The federal government is not looking after its own areas of jurisdiction, yet it is meddling even more in the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces.

The crux of this debate is really the federal government's role. If our colleagues want a unitary state where all decisions are made in Ottawa, they should just come out and say it. Some countries do it that way. It is a vision that can be defended. However, it would mean reopening the Constitution, which scares them. I am convinced that Quebecers will never agree to lose their autonomy and their powers.

My colleagues from the other parties say they are federalists. They should be federalists, then. They should accept that they do

not have all the power, and they should trust Quebec and the provinces to take care of their own jurisdictions. Once we recognize the fiscal imbalance issue, which will remain as long as Canada is governed by the current Constitution, on the one hand, and by the need to take action to help our people, on the other, the House will have to ask itself some real questions. When the federal system was set up, the major needs were things that fell under federal jurisdiction: fighting in the British Empire's wars to take over the Boer diamond mines, building armoured ships for that empire and destroying indigenous nations through famines, reservations and residential schools. Those were the federal government's priorities back when the federal regime was created. It had real needs and it dipped into the provinces' finances.

However, in 2024, the real needs are in Quebec and the provinces. The solutions to the real problems are also in the hands of the Quebec and provincial governments. If the House really wants to help people with housing or their children's dental care, it should stop and think. Instead of thinking up nationwide projects that are bound to be ill adapted, the federal government should abandon its ambitions of controlling everything. It should eliminate the fiscal imbalance. It should give Quebec and the provinces the means to take care of their people. If not, it should be sincere—something that is often lacking in the House—and reopen the Constitution once and for all. The Government of Canada should just become a unitary government and put it to the people to see how they respond, unless it is too afraid that, this time, Quebecers will tell it once and for all that they are really leaving.

● (1345)

Mrs. Brenda Shanahan (Châteauguay—Lacolle, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I really appreciated my colleague's speech. We work together on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. Her diligent work on public accounts is really important, and it shows how attentive she is to detail.

Since she used to work as a financial consultant, I know that she fully understands how important funding for any project is. That is where the federal government is a real partner with the provinces, especially Quebec. One example that comes to mind is the lack of connectivity in my region. That was a big problem about 10 years ago. I was one of the people who argued that it needed to be dealt with by the provinces. It was Quebec that dealt with Hydro-Québec for telecommunications poles, but the federal government provided more than \$1 billion.

Does my colleague think it is a good idea to work together like that?

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. This is a good example of what the Constitution says. There was no Internet when the Constitution was created, when the federal system was created.

Business of Supply

All new powers belong to the federal government, and for once, the government acted with respect for jurisdictions. For once, the federal government handed over the money to Quebec, and it was a victory for the Bloc Québécois. As a result, Quebec became the province with the best connectivity in Canada. Thanks to the Bloc Québécois, which pressured the federal government into accepting its responsibilities and sending money to Quebec so that it could do what needed to be done, everything was resolved.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

I began my speech earlier by mentioning how intimidating it was to speak after my colleagues who had started off the debate on our opposition day and before those who would speak after me.

I congratulate my colleague on her speech. She did a great job explaining today's theme. However, I would like her to talk a bit about the Conservatives' silence. Nobody seems too keen to talk about that today. Is it perhaps because, to help solve the housing crisis, the Leader of the Opposition proposed including conditions in his bill? Is it perhaps because the Conservatives have announced that they will probably oppose Bill 21 and challenge Quebec's call for secularism? Is it simply because the Conservatives are not prepared to honour the request from Quebec and the provinces to increase health transfers to 35%?

It is all well and good to say that they are not going to impose conditions, but if they do not meet the main demand, which is to significantly increase transfers, the problem will not be solved. Could this explain some of the Conservatives' silence?

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagn : Madam Speaker, that is an excellent question.

Maybe if I said the words "tax" and "carbon", they would finally have a reason to stand up and speak, but today we are talking about something else that should be top of mind for them, and that is Quebec.

I think that party believes it can take power by completely ignoring the needs of Quebecers. That is what it is doing today; it is ignoring what we want.

As my colleague said, the other reason is internal division. The old Conservatives respect jurisdictions, but the new ones, the neo-Conservatives, do not really understand the concept of separate jurisdictions. They want a hand in everything under the sun because they are driven by populism and lowest-common-denominator politics.

• (1350)

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be able to rise and take advantage of the unwillingness of Conservative, Liberal and NDP members to ask questions following the speech by my colleague from Terrebonne. Let me correct what I just said: A Liberal member did rise earlier. I understand that this may be a somewhat sensitive topic for the parties that would like to make gains in Quebec. We know that this is a matter of concern to Quebecers.

Earlier, my colleague mentioned a Bloc Qu b cois win, namely the fact that the federal government transferred funds to Quebec to

bring high-speed Internet to all regions of Quebec. The program has worked better in the hands of the Government of Quebec, because the federal government had been dawdling for years. There are still problems of this nature, especially when it comes to cell-phone coverage. There are a lot of problems like that.

Does my colleague not think that, ultimately, the federal government should simply redistribute the money to Quebec and the provinces so that matters are resolved within a reasonable time frame and in a more competent manner?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mend s): The honourable member for Terrebonne's response needs to be brief.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagn : The answer is: absolutely.

Every time the federal government has transferred funds to Quebec, the problem has naturally been solved. Quebec was one of the forerunners in terms of high connectivity in the regions and in terms of cellular connection.

The less the federal government touches provincial and Quebec issues, the better off the provinces are. Again, until Quebec becomes independent, all we want are health transfers and, of course —

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Alexandra Mend s): Unfortunately, we have to resume debate.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the motion brought forward by the Bloc today, because it really demonstrates a great deal of contrast. On the one hand, we have what I would classify as the unholy alliance between the Conservatives, or Reformers, and the Bloc party. That unholy alliance believes that Canada does not have a role to play when it comes to providing services like health care. I asked the leader of the Conservative Party about that earlier today. They do not believe there is a need for a national dental program, even though thousands and thousands of Canadians in all regions of our country are signing up and are benefiting from that program.

Just recently, the Prime Minister of Canada was in the province of Manitoba, in the north end of Winnipeg. We were talking about about a national school food program, which would put food and nutrition in the stomachs of children so they would better be able to learn. We are seeing these types of national programs. Where are the Bloc and the Conservatives on this? They are saying no. That is putting partisan party politics ahead of the constituents they represent, because these programs are very important.

Statements by Members

I think of former prime minister Mackenzie King. When he was prime minister, he brought forward programs to deal with things like pensions for seniors, the OAS and unemployment insurance. He brought forward the family allowance. Let us compare those programs, in which people in all regions of the country believe, with the types of programs we have brought in over the last number of years. What is consistent is that the separatists, the Bloc, continue to say no, and the Conservatives support the Bloc on that. They do not think Ottawa should be focusing on what they deem as provincial responsibility. That is not taking responsibility for what Canadians are telling us.

Canadians understand and appreciate the value of a national child care program. Much like how a health care program started in Saskatchewan and was helpful in that province, the Province of Quebec had a wonderful child care program. We were able to take that program and turn it into a national child care program. It is not just some people in one region of the country who have benefited; all of Canada now benefits, because we have a national child care program, something the Conservative Party has said it will rip up.

I have asked questions about health care, something Canadians value so much. The Conservative Party, the official opposition with its Tory hidden agenda, the Reformers across the way, does not support health care, nowhere near the degree to which we do. The Conservative Party would be lucky if it maintained the financial transfers. We can look at what we have done. Right from the beginning, we negotiated with provinces and came up with health care accords that would ensure there would be ongoing co-operation in delivering the type of health care services that Canadians expect coast to coast. There is the difference.

We invested just under \$200 billion in health care so that future generations of Canadians would have the quality health care system they deserved. Again, we have the Conservatives saying no. The Conservative Party is in opposition to many of the progressive measures that are making a real difference in our communities, whether it is child care, the dental program or the pharmacare program. These programs will help thousands of Canadians throughout the country, but the Conservative Party does not support those types of initiatives.

• (1355)

All the Conservatives want to talk about are their bumper sticker issues. They want to be critical of the government and do character assassinations. That is where their focus is. We can compare and contrast that to a government that understands.

Let us look at the budget. Members will see in the budget a true reflection of what Canadians want to see because we have members of Parliament who are committed to listening to their constituents. They take those ideas, bring them here to Ottawa and implement them in public policy. That is why we have a national pharmacare program and a national child care program. It is because we understand the needs of Canadians. We want to be there to provide supports.

I find it hard to imagine how members of the Bloc, the separatist party, would put their separatist attitudes ahead of the constituents they represent. There are literally thousands of people in the province of Quebec, as an example, who are going to benefit from

the dental program. They are registered to receive dental benefits. These are seniors on fixed incomes. Bloc members have chosen their separatist attitude to break up the country over seniors on fixed incomes. I find that sad.

I believe, whether we are talking about a senior living in Quebec, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, B.C., or anywhere in between, including up north, providing these types of national programs makes a difference. William Mackenzie King demonstrated that through the many programs he put in place, and these are programs that we value today. We recognize those programs as a part of our Canadian identity. I suggest the types of programs we are bringing in today are going to make a profoundly positive impact on the Confederation. These are the types of services that are going to be there for years ahead.

The greatest threat to the services I am talking about is the Reform Party members across the way. They are so far to the right that they do not put the constituents, the people of Canada, first and foremost. They are prepared to cut. They will not hesitate to cut back on child care, pharmacare or dental programs. They would cut them instead of providing those programs the opportunity to be there for Canadians or expanding upon them. We all should be concerned about that.

I would love to see an election based on the Confederation, on the Canadian flag.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[English]

LUPUS AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize May as Lupus Awareness Month. Lupus is a chronic disease characterized by inflammation that can affect anyone at any point in their life. Over one in every thousand Canadians has been diagnosed, a process that takes seven years, on average.

Treating lupus requires a comprehensive plan that often includes medication and consistent health care supervision, while considering the costs and barriers associated with care. As our government remains committed to ensuring access to equitable care and treatment within our health care system for all Canadians, it is important to raise awareness and drive change during Lupus Awareness Month and beyond. I thank Lupus Canada for the work it does as we strive to continue improving health outcomes for all Canadians.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years of the Prime Minister, life has become so expensive that more of our Canadians are having difficulty feeding themselves and their families. The Medicine Hat Root Cellar Food and Wellness Hub, which is our food bank, has seen a 170% increase in clients since 2019, a 36% growth in the last year alone.

Over 2,700 individuals per month require emergency food in my community, and 63% of those are new food bank users. Overwhelmingly, these clients state that the reason for needing to access emergency food is the inflationary rise in the cost of living. The Root Cellar is having difficulty securing enough food to meet its increased needs. Many of its previous middle-class donors have fallen into poverty, and scores of businesses who were once donors are now also unable to support in the same capacity, all due to the country's economic crisis.

These are the real-life consequences of the failed economic policies the NDP-Liberal coalition government has inflicted on Canadians. Life was not like this before the Prime Minister, and it will not be like this after Conservatives fix the mess.

* * *

[Translation]

VIRGINIA PESEMAPEO BORDELEAU

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, at the end of May, the Université de Moncton will award an honorary Doctor of Arts degree to Ms. Virginia Pesemapeo Bordeleau. Born in James Bay, Ms. Pesemapeo Bordeleau is a multidisciplinary Eyou artist. For over 40 years, she has exhibited her vibrantly coloured surrealist paintings in Quebec, Canada, Europe and Mexico.

Author of three novels, three collections of poetry, a children's book, correspondence and short stories, this is not her first honour. I do not have the time to list all the honours she has been awarded. In 2020, she was awarded the Prix de l'Artiste de l'année en Abitibi-Témiscamingue by the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec. In 2021, she received the Médaille de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec for her body of work. Also in 2023, she was named Chevalier de l'Ordre des Palmes académiques of the French Republic.

It is in Senneterre that she continues to paint, disseminate culture, sculpt and, of course, write.

I want to congratulate Ms. Pesemapeo Bordeleau for this much-deserved new honour.

* * *

[English]

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a recent Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities conference, community leaders came together to unite on how to continue unlocking the north's potential. This includes supporting and expanding the north's prosperous mining sector, which is a major leader of the green energy transition. Last week, the federal government an-

Statements by Members

nounced \$11 million for EV battery-operated vehicles at the Onaping Depth underground mine in Nickel Belt.

[Translation]

Whether we are talking about mining, the paper or forestry industry and other sectors of economic development, northern Ontario continues to offer solutions.

The “BEV In Depth: Mines to Mobility” conference will be held at Cambrian College. Industry experts will explore the challenges of establishing entire supply chains in battery manufacturing for electric vehicles.

The member for Sudbury and I will be there. We encourage all members to attend.

* * *

• (1405)

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years of the NDP-Liberal government, crime, chaos and disorder are getting much worse in Saskatoon. In neighbourhood after neighbourhood, the government-fuelled opioid crime spree is hurting everyday, common-sense Canadians.

The Liberal-funded supervised drug consumption site on 20th Street has created a chaotic and dangerous situation for residents. The local dentist, who cleans up garbage and human feces on a daily basis, was assaulted, and she has had to delay appointments because her clients could not get into the building. Last week, Canada Post stopped deliveries to the area because of the rampant drug use and crime. In the Fairhaven area, a new 106-bed shelter has attracted chaos and disorder to a formerly calm neighbourhood. The mayor has acknowledged that tent encampments have tripled in the past year, pushing locals out of their park and making residents fearful to go outside, even during the day.

This is Saskatoon after nine years of the NDP-Liberal's so-called harm reduction. The only way out would be a new Conservative government, which would finally end the drugs and stop the crime.

* * *

WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT BOXING CHAMPION

Mr. Marcus Powlowski (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday night, Ukrainian boxer Oleksandr Usyk defeated much bigger fighter Tyson Fury to become the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world, the first in 24 years. Ironically, Fury himself first became a champion in beating another Ukrainian fighter, Wladimir Klitschko, the brother of the current mayor of Kyiv, Ukraine.

Statements by Members

As Ukraine continues to defend itself against a much larger Russian invader, it has been struggling to hold the front line in recent weeks, largely due to a shortage of ammunition, which is thankfully starting to arrive from the United States. Saturday was a great victory for Usyk, a great victory for boxing and, most of all, a great victory for Ukraine, as Usyk showed the world how, with sufficient heart, strength and intelligence, a smaller fighter can always defeat a larger one.

Slava Ukraini.

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MINING INDUSTRY

Ms. Viviane Lapointe (Sudbury, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to materials, anything that is not grown is mined. Canada's rich critical minerals resources are a generational economic opportunity. These minerals are the building blocks of clean technologies, from lithium in EV batteries to copper transmission lines and so much more that the world needs to build a prosperous and sustainable future.

Our \$100-billion mining industry supports 700,000 direct and indirect jobs, including those in my riding of Sudbury. This is an industry with many well-paying union jobs that we are proud of. We are unlocking our critical minerals future through our \$3.8-billion strategy, including an infrastructure fund, an R and D program, tax credits and indigenous partnership programs.

We owe it to our mining businesses, our innovators and, most of all, the upcoming generations of workers to make sure the Canadian economy will thrive in a changing world, and that is exactly what we are doing.

* * *

VEHICLE THEFT

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's soft-on-crime agenda has led to a crime wave of motor vehicle theft, and Canadians are paying the cost. The cost of insurance claims for auto theft has skyrocketed to \$1.5 billion, smashing the previous record. Not only are Canadians having their vehicles stolen, but they are also facing higher insurance premiums, thanks to the Liberal government's refusal to crack down on auto theft. In Ontario alone, the Insurance Bureau of Canada estimated that auto thefts added an extra \$130 to insurance payments last year, and that number is set to go up again.

Conservatives would hit the brakes on auto theft. We would end the Liberal's catch-and-release justice system, which gives bail to repeat offenders within hours of their arrest, and we would repeal Bill C-5 to take away house arrest for auto theft, so criminals could no longer walk out their front door to steal another car. Our common-sense plan would protect people's property and bring home safe streets.

* * *

HEART LAKE TURTLE TROOPERS

Hon. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today to recognize an organization in my community that takes environmental conservation to heart. The

Heart Lake Turtle Troopers was recently named Brampton's 2024 Grow Green Environmental Award winner.

Heart Lake Turtle Troopers volunteers not only save injured turtles and build and maintain nest protectors to keep them safe, but also collect data and run education campaigns to secure the future of conservation for these turtles. This is a grassroots organization that started out with only two members and now has a community of volunteers. Protecting our planet is all of our responsibility, and this organization is proof that small actions can have a big impact.

I congratulate the Heart Lake Turtle Troopers and thank it for all the work it does for conservation in our community.

* * *

● (1410)

TAIWAN

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today in support of Taiwan's participation in the World Health Assembly. Taiwan's exclusion from global health initiatives is a significant gap in global health security that must be addressed. Despite Taiwan's significant contributions to global health worldwide through providing aid and assistance to many countries, it has faced obstacles in fully participating in WHO initiatives.

Taiwan's inclusion into the World Health Assembly would not only benefit its citizens but also the global community. Considering the upcoming WHA meeting from May 27 to June 1, I urge the World Health Organization and its members to recognize Taiwan's efforts in and contributions to global health and to grant it full participation in the World Health Assembly. I urge it to let Taiwan help. It has lots to offer.

4-H CANADA

Mr. John Barlow (Foothills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years, the Liberal-NDP government is not worth the cost to Canadian farmers. This time, it is cutting funding to one of our most successful volunteer organizations. For 111 years, 4-H Canada has been teaching Canadian youth about community, farming and leadership, but in one of his first moves, the Liberal agriculture minister celebrated this incredible milestone by slashing funding to 4-H by 30%. This has forced it to restructure and put incredible programs, such as the Citizenship Congress, at risk. 4-H'ers learn by doing, working hard to promote sustainable agriculture and teach Canadians about where their food comes from.

Conservatives understand the importance of Canadian agriculture and being a champion for Canadian youth, who are going to be driving innovation and future economic growth. That is why a future Conservative government will reverse the Liberal funding cuts to 4-H by diverting millions of dollars from Agriculture Canada, because our priority is not going to be useless consultants; our priority is Canadian youth programs, such as 4-H.

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THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Shelby Kramp-Neuman (Hastings—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years of this Liberal-NDP Prime Minister, more Canadians are hungry and homeless. The Parliamentary Budget Officer agrees. According to his report, the government is failing to meet its target of ending homelessness. In fact, it is getting worse, increasing by 88% between 2018 and 2022, with nearly 80% purely based on affordability reasons.

Since then, with the help of its NDP enablers and grocery store lobbyist connections, food inflation is at a 40-year high. This is a direct result of a government that has refused to take responsibility for its actions. The response is always the same on its failures: "It's not our fault, but don't worry, we will fix it later."

The alarming stats on homelessness are outright insulting. These are not just numbers; these are people. After nearly a decade of having the Liberals in power, Canada is not recognizable. It looks more like it did in 1934, not like it should in 2024, nor like it will under a common-sense Conservative government.

* * *

[Translation]

SYLVIE BRUNELLE

Mrs. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is more unifying than a public market, a gathering place for the community, a showcase for our farmers and local artisans? With Sylvie Brunelle, the Marché de la gare de Sherbrooke has also become a place where magic happens. As the coordinator for the station market corporation, Ms. Brunelle has, over the years, been able to bring local actors together to put on incredible events for the people of Sherbrooke.

A visit to the Christmas market has become a tradition for many Sherbrooke families. Ms. Brunelle never hesitates to pitch in to energize her events. She even plays the role of Mrs. Claus, to the delight of the little ones. She is also very involved in welcoming

Statements by Members

young entrepreneurs during the holiday season so that they can have their first sales experience.

Ms. Brunelle has decided to take on new endeavours and I wish her all the best. On behalf of the people of Sherbrooke, I thank Ms. Brunelle for her involvement in our community.

* * *

• (1415)

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this past week, three more countries announced that they will be formally recognizing Palestine as a state. Around the world, the overwhelming reaction has been "it's about time". This means that 143 countries will recognize Palestine as a state. They recognize that Palestinian statehood is something that is not granted; rather, it is an inherent right.

We are also seeing how empty the words are of those who support a two-state solution but argue that there should not be a recognition of Palestinian statehood unless it is negotiated. That brings us to the Liberal government. At a critical time in history, the Liberals stand for everything and nothing. Where do they actually stand on Palestinian statehood?

If there is one lesson from history, it is that it did not just happen. The conflict in Palestine did not just happen. A two-state solution is needed to build peace. It requires two states and the political will to make this happen.

Our message in the Parliament should be clear: If one is not part of the solution, one is part of the problem. Recognizing Palestine as a state is being part of the solution. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs must take a stand for peace, for security, for justice.

* * *

[Translation]

DÉPANNEUR SAINT-FRANÇOIS

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we know a thing or two about helping and supporting one another in Lac-Saint-Jean.

More than five years ago, the municipality of Saint-François-de-Sales, in my riding, became a true food desert with the closure of the only grocery store in the community. It was nearly impossible for many seniors to travel to the major centres so the community rolled up its sleeves and came up with a solution. That is how the Dépanneur Saint-François came to be.

Oral Questions

Open year round, seven hours a day, four days a week, the convenience store is run entirely by volunteers. In fact, it was the volunteers who came up with the idea for the store and they are the ones who continue to ensure its operation. It comes as no surprise that the Saint-François convenience store is the pride of the municipality and a model that proves that in Lac-Saint-Jean we have gumption and we never hesitate to pull together.

To all these volunteers whose involvement makes a real difference in our community, I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

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[English]

REX MURPHY

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, I rise in equal parts sadness and gratitude to honour the incredible life of a great Canadian, Rex Murphy. Rex was born a proud Newfoundland. He became known as a pugnacious critic of those in power, even Joey Smallwood, and that was not easy in those days. He would go on to be a political assistant, for both major political parties in that province, and then a national voice.

Rex would give fantastic, spectacular rants on the CBC. Yes, even I watched the CBC to listen to Rex. He would then go on to host *Cross Country Checkup*, where he would listen with compassion and respect to the voices of the common people. He would write many pieces of good works in poetry, storytelling and polemics. His voice will now be missed by all.

I join all Canadians in giving our thanks to Rex for all he did. May he rest in the peace of God.

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MILITARY VETERANS WELLNESS PROGRAM

Mr. Bryan May (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the work of the military veterans wellness program, championed by Constable Aaron Dale of the Toronto police. This program provides increased training and awareness for law enforcement assisting veterans in crisis.

In my riding, constables David Cassidy and Brian Serapiglia have been instrumental in bringing the program to Waterloo region. Thanks to their initiative, we can provide our first responders with a better understanding of military culture and de-escalation training, and we can rapidly refer veterans to national support services. This partnership with Veterans Affairs Canada has expanded to 80 police forces, helping over 200 veterans to date.

I encourage all my colleagues in the House to reach out to their local law enforcement to ensure that they have access to this incredible free program. Together, we can equip Canadian law enforcement with the tools they need to support veterans across Canada.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years, it is clear that the Prime Minister is not worth the cost. Homelessness is up by 38% and a quarter of Canadians skip meals because they cannot afford to eat. The Bloc voted for \$500 billion in centralist, inflationary spending to hire an additional 100,000 public servants and double spending on consultants. It says it had no choice, because the government would shut down otherwise.

Could the government inform the Bloc that this spending was going to pass with the NDP's help, regardless of how the Bloc voted?

• (1420)

Hon. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Minister of Tourism and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find that to be a rather hypocritical question.

The Conservative Party uses the word “homelessness”, yet that word does not even appear in its platform or plan. I find it hypocritical coming from a party that, in the House, has voted against every measure that aims to put a roof over Canadians' heads. I think the Conservative Party needs to do some soul-searching about its true intentions when it comes to fighting homelessness.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister doubled the national debt and raised taxes and inflation on the grounds that all that money would fund generous programs to eliminate homelessness. Since then, homelessness has increased by 38%, and one-quarter of Canadians are skipping meals because they do not have enough money. With the support of the Bloc, the government is consuming every penny Canadians have.

Why is the Liberal Bloc forcing Canadians to feed this obese government instead of their families?

Hon. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Minister of Tourism and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is the height of hypocrisy.

That party voted against the school food program. When we talk about feeding Canadians, we start with children, but they voted against that. We say that people are out of money and that we are helping them, but they voted against the Canada child benefit. When we tell them that we are going to help Canadians put a roof over their heads and pay their rent, they vote against it.

Would they please make up their minds? Do they want to help Canadians or cut their services?

[English]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years, the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister is not worth the homelessness and hunger. He doubled the debt, increased taxes and caused inflation, but he said it was all to fund generous programs that would end homelessness. Homelessness is now up 38%, and a quarter of Canadians are skipping meals because they cannot afford them. That is because his greedy government is consuming everything Canadians earn.

Why are the NDP and Liberals forcing Canadians to feed this morbidly obese government instead of feeding their families?

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will take no lessons from the Conservatives, who purport to care about poverty and Canadians, when every single time they vote against supports, such as \$10-a-day child care and early learning and childhood education. They are not supporting our budgetary measures to put food in school lunch boxes for 400,000 children. It is unbelievable that, on the one hand, they say they support Canadians, but, on the other hand, they vote against those supports every single time.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful the member points out that we have voted against every single policy that has caused homelessness to rise by 38%. We have voted against every single inflationary policy that has forced one-quarter of Canadians to skip meals because they cannot afford a meal on their table. The government has doubled the debt, increased inflation and blocked home building.

Why is it that it forces Canadians to feed this morbidly obese government rather than feeding their families?

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is actually focused on keeping inflation low so interest rates can come down. I will note that inflation has come down below the targeted range of 3%. At the same time, we have budget 2024: We have supports for renters, we have supports for affordable housing, and we have a national school food program on the table. We will continue to support Canadians with dental and early childhood education, all while the Conservatives vote against. There is no plan on that side of the House. We will support Canadians—

• (1425)

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister repeats the same costly promises the Prime Minister has been breaking for nine years.

In a six-week period, 50 homeless encampments have opened in Toronto. Let that sink in. There are a total of 256 tent cities in Toronto alone. It was not like this before the current Prime Minister, and it will not be like this after he is gone. Will he admit that everything is broken after nine years of his government?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the member was the minister responsible for housing, there were more than two million more Canadians living in poverty, and the number of times he talked about vulnerable people or taking action to help the homeless was zero. He wants to hold out to people,

Oral Questions

in a time of difficulty across the world, that the solution is to cut the programs they need, to take away dental care, to take away pharmaceutical. Shame on him for it. We will stand up for vulnerable people in a way he never has.

* * *

[Translation]

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Hogue commission has complained that the Liberals are still keeping foreign interference under wraps. The Prime Minister's Office is invoking cabinet confidence to redact documents and even prevent the judge from having access to them. We are not even talking about the documents that will be published; we are talking about the documents needed for the investigation by the judge, whose mandate is to protect this strategic information.

This calls into question the commission's effectiveness. The Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs promised that the judge would have access to all the documents.

Does he agree that enough is enough with the secrecy?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the question from my friend from the Bloc Québécois. I was pleased to work with him and our opposition colleagues last summer to set up the Hogue commission. He knows very well that we are committed to sharing cabinet information with the commission, at an exceptional time that does not happen very often, as we did with Mr. Johnston.

We will always be available to work with the commission so that it has access to all the appropriate documents.

Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, they cannot help themselves. The reason the Hogue commission was put in place is that the Liberals were covering up foreign interference from day one. The Hogue commission was created to put an end to that. It was created to get to the bottom of things with the help of a neutral, non-partisan judge. The public does not need to read the confidential information, but the judge does. That is part of her mandate. If the commission does not have access to the information, then Quebecers will lose confidence in this investigation.

Will the Liberals finally act responsibly and, more importantly, will they finally be transparent with the judge?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. We will continue to be transparent and co-operate with the commission. I agree with my colleague. A judge as exceptional as Justice Hogue from the Quebec Court of Appeal is very well positioned to give Canadians confidence in our democratic institutions.

Canadians need to understand that the government will always ensure that the commission has access to all the documents needed to do this important work.

Oral Questions

I really appreciated the work that I was able to do with my friend, the member for La Prairie.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, its waters are warming too fast. It is becoming increasingly acidic, with ever diminishing oxygen levels. That is the alarming condition of our St. Lawrence River.

Scientists are sounding the alarm. Its current oxygen levels are fatal to many aquatic species. Now is the time to give the river legal status. The Minister of Environment and Climate Change, however, is neglecting this serious problem.

What will it take for this Minister of Environment to confer legal rights on the St. Lawrence River in order to protect biodiversity in Quebec?

• (1430)

Hon. Steven Guilbeault (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

Still, I would like to remind him that, when we took office in 2015, Canada was not even protecting 1% of its territorial waters and coastlines. Now, that figure is 15% and will likely rise to 20% in the next few years, as we make our way to at least 30% by 2030, the target agreed upon by all the countries at COP15 in Montreal.

We are investing record amounts, particularly in partnership with indigenous peoples across the country, to protect more and more of our land.

[*English*]

Ms. Laurel Collins (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, families saw their homes burned to the ground in northern British Columbia this week, and summer has not even started. However, the Conservatives do not seem to think that climate change is real, and the environment minister offers up nothing but empty words and delays.

The Liberals refuse to invest the billion dollars needed for a B.C. watershed security fund that would prevent wildfires and save lives. They knew this wildfire season was going to be devastating for communities, and yet they are leaving British Columbians to fend for themselves. Will the government fix its mistake and immediately establish a B.C. watershed security fund?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certainly the issues that we have seen around forest fires last year and, unfortunately, this year, particularly in British Columbia and in the Fort Nelson area, have been devastating. Certainly our hearts go out to all those folks who are affected. It is the reason why we have set aside \$350 million to help provinces procure equipment, and it is the reason why we are actually training forest firefighters. Fundamentally, it is the reason why we have a comprehensive climate plan to ensure that we are addressing the existential threat of climate change. The Conservative Party of Canada has a climate plan: It is to let the planet burn. It is irresponsible and it is shameful.

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a hat trick for the Prime Minister, but not the good type. Three reports released in just one day paint a devastating picture of life in Canada after nine years of the NDP-Liberal government. Food Banks Canada, the Salvation Army and the Parliamentary Budget Officer all say there is more homelessness and there is more hunger. The Liberals kept telling us that they are spending our money for our own good, that everything is fine and it is not their fault. It has been nine years. Whose fault is it?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, grocery price inflation is coming down. It was 1.4% in April, down from 1.9% a month before. This is encouraging news, certainly for Canadians, but it is important to know that our government put forward the most comprehensive package of competition reforms in Canadian history. Why? More competition equals better prices. However, it is a bit rich for the Conservatives to point to food bank lineups when they oppose a national school food program that would feed over 400,000 kids across Canada.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nine years later, it has not fed a single child. The Liberals just do not get it. The very policies that they have delivered have given us the worst quality of life in half a century, the worst since the last Trudeau ran this place.

In the past three months, 25% of young adults have had to go to a food bank in this country. There is 38% more homelessness after the Liberals promised to end it, and about 50% of Canadians are worse off this year than they were last year. How does the government have so much money to spare, while ordinary Canadians are literally going hungry and homeless?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is quite the statement from the deputy leader of the Conservative Party. My advice to her is to actually read the report from the Parliamentary Budget Officer. In that report, she will see that no fewer than 50,000 Canadians are supported by the national housing strategy, specifically the Reaching Home program, which the Conservatives would cut. We know they champion an austerity agenda. This is also from the deputy leader, who made clear only a few weeks ago, on a yacht no less, that fewer homes have to be built in Canada. The Conservatives are siding with the NIMBYs. We want to build more homes, including for the most vulnerable in this country.

• (1435)

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years of the NDP-Liberal government, Canadians are hungry and homeless. It is becoming more clear: The more inflationary spending the Liberals do, the worse it gets for Canadians. We need look no further than the Ottawa Food Bank report that came out this week, which said that half a million visits were made to the food bank in our nation's capital last year. That is a 95% increase in the last five years and a 22% increase in the last year alone, and 36% of them were children. How many more times are the Liberals going to hike the carbon tax before they realize it is driving millions more people to food banks?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it more than ironic that the Conservative member across the way mentions children when he is going to stand up in short order and oppose a national school food program for which Food Banks Canada and Food Secure Canada have advocated for over 10 years because they know that it would impact food insecurity in this country in a dramatic way. There is \$1 billion in federal budget 2024 to feed 400,000 more kids, and the Conservatives say, “No, we will not support that.”

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years, that program has fed exactly zero children in this country. The only thing it is doing is feeding the bureaucracy here in Ottawa.

Let us take a look and see what Food Banks Canada had to say about the government's poverty measures. The report card came out this week, and the government got an F, a failing grade for what it is doing as it is driving millions more people to food banks each and every year. The report says that it is only going to get worse the more the government hikes the carbon tax and makes life more expensive.

How many more damning reports need to come out before the government axes the carbon tax to help with the price of food?

Hon. Jenna Sudds (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to share one of the responses to budget 2024 and the announcement of the funding of the national school food program. Breakfast Club of Canada released a statement saying that this program “marks a turning point in the country's commitment to the well-being of all children”.

Oral Questions

Children learn best on a full stomach, and investments today in children are investments for tomorrow. On this side of the House, we will continue to invest in the well-being of children. The Conservatives owe Canadians an explanation as to why they would not make these investments.

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[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years of this Liberal Prime Minister, Quebecers are going hungry, and more and more of them are winding up on the street. This week, three devastating reports confirmed that the Liberals' inflationary spending, supported by the Bloc Québécois, is hurting the most vulnerable, as well as families and workers. According to a Salvation Army study, food insecurity is affecting more and more Quebecers. Fully 25% of parents are skipping meals so they can feed their kids.

Why do the “Liberal Bloc” and this Prime Minister, who are not worth the cost, prefer to feed the bloated federal government rather than Quebecers?

Hon. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Minister of Tourism and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, I would invite the member to tell his Conservative Party colleagues to include the words “homelessness”, “fighting poverty” and “investing in Canadians” in their plan if they are serious about supporting Canadians.

I can give them a few ideas. They could start by voting in favour of the programs we are putting in place to tackle poverty, rent increases and the housing crisis and to help feed kids. I think that is fundamental.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years, it was the Liberal government, supported by the Bloc Québécois, that caused this crisis and today it would like us to applaud them.

That is totally irresponsible of them. Because of this Prime Minister's \$500 billion in inflationary spending, which the Bloc Québécois supported, everything is more expensive, including gas, food and housing, and more and more Canadians and Quebecers are going to food banks. The Liberals are the ones who created the crisis.

Will the Prime Minister admit that it is time to curb this centralizing government's voracious appetite so that all Quebecers can finally get enough to eat?

Oral Questions

Hon. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Minister of Tourism and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind Canadians who are listening that if a Conservative government had been in place during the greatest pandemic we ever experienced, people would have suffered enormously.

Today, we are in a better position because a Liberal government was there to support Canadians during the biggest crisis we have ever gone through.

Today, what we are asking of them is quite simple. We are asking them to pass dental care reforms, pass food reforms, pass housing reforms. Let us pass all that.

* * *

• (1440)

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us get back to the case of the member for Glengary—Prescott—Russell.

To prevent him from being sacked as chair of the association des parlementaires de la francophonie, the Liberals infiltrated the organization. They signed up in droves, swelling the number of Liberals from 25 to 112, including a whole bunch of unilingual anglophones. For the first time, the APF had to send out an agenda in English. It even had to bring in interpreters for the unilingual English-speaking Liberals suddenly enamoured with the French language.

Do the Liberals realize that, in order to protect their colleagues in the APF, they are literally anglicizing it?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada will always be there to support the international Francophonie. In fact, Canada is one of the co-founders of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

I would like to remind my colleague that we are not talking about the association des parlementaires, but about the Assemblée des parlementaires de la Francophonie. Under the circumstances, we will not only continue to support the assemblée, but we should also be proud of the fact that it is a Canadian, a truly great Canadian, a Franco-Ontarian, who chairs this organization.

We will always be there to protect French in Quebec, across the country and around the world.

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's correction.

To protect a Liberal who denies the decline of French in Quebec, the Liberals are taking responsibility for the decline of the APF. I could not make this stuff up. That is not all they are responsible for, though. All those new French language enthusiasts at the APF must have read the report released by the Office québécois de la langue française yesterday. Guess which sector has the lowest proportion of workers using French most often in Quebec workplaces? The federal public service.

The Liberals are the primary drivers of workplace anglicization in Quebec. When will they stop driving the decline of French?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we will take absolutely no lessons from the Bloc Québécois. We know that the Bloc Québécois's objective will always be to prove that sovereignty alone will work for Quebeckers.

Quebeckers are not buying it. Quebeckers know that having a strong government, a government that is prepared to recognize, for the first time in history, the decline of French in Quebec and across the country, will enable them to redouble their efforts to improve and protect the language of Molière and to be there for francophones across the country.

The Bloc Québécois is really in no position to be lecturing us.

Mr. René Villemure (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is laughable.

The federal government is the worst employer in Quebec when it comes to protecting French. Coincidentally, it is the main employer in the Gatineau region. Between 2016 and 2021, the proportion of Gatineau residents working mainly in French went from 77% to 62%. That is a 17% drop in just four years.

We are talking about the ridings of Gatineau, Hull—Aylmer, Pontiac, Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, all four represented by Liberal members. Their public service is the worst workplace for French in Quebec. Coincidentally, French is declining everywhere, and more so in Gatineau than elsewhere.

Instead of protecting their colleagues at the APF, will they protect francophones in Gatineau?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of Quebec's representation in the Government of Canada's public service. This government has increased Quebec's representation in the federal public service.

We are very proud to have Government of Canada public service jobs in Quebec, just as we are proud of having Quebeckers work on the other side of the river. Yes, we operate a bilingual government that takes care of both official languages on both sides of the river.

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[English]

CARBON PRICING

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years of the NDP-Liberal government, more Canadians are hungry and homeless. We see it across the country with our own eyes, and it is now affirmed by Food Banks Canada's latest report. According to the report, nearly 50% of Canadians feel financially worse off compared to last year, and one in four people is going hungry. I have heard from several food banks that the fastest-growing demographics they serve are working families and seniors.

The character of a nation is revealed in how it treats its most vulnerable, and Canada is failing them. When will the NDP-Liberal government get off Canadians' backs and respond to their desperate pleas? How about they start now by axing the carbon tax?

• (1445)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and to the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to see that Conservatives are finally aligning themselves with Food Banks Canada. We saw that over a decade of the Harper Conservatives, they did nothing to address food insecurity in Canada.

Today our government is creating more competition in the marketplace, and we are investing in a national school food program, both of which the Conservatives oppose. I do not know how the Conservatives can say they care about struggling Canadians, when they oppose these programs and would take food out of the mouths of children.

Mr. Richard Bragdon (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what an incredibly all-encompassing and comprehensive non-answer that was from the member.

Just a couple of months ago I visited the food bank in Oromocto, New Brunswick. Oromocto is home to Canadian Forces Base Galetown, Canada's largest military base. We were shocked when we discovered from the director of the food bank there that it serves upward of 50 military service members and their families. That is one out of every 10 clients they serve.

Our brave men and women deserve better, and they are asking for the government to do the right thing. It is not more than what they can give right now. Why does the government not start by axing the tax and getting off Canadians' backs?

Hon. Bill Blair (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I marvel at the temerity of a person who would stand in the House, vote against a well-earned pay raise for every member of the Canadian Armed Forces, and then stand up and pretend that they actually care about the men and women who serve in our forces.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine long years, the Prime Minister is simply not worth the cost. The numbers out from Food Banks Canada are damning: Fifty per cent of people in Saskatchewan feel they are worse off this year than last year, and 35% of Saskatchewanians are afraid they are not going to be able to feed themselves or their family.

The NDP-Liberal costly coalition can do the right thing right now and axe the tax so parents can put food on the table for their kids.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that the member and the Conservative Party want to ruin the rebate for Canadians. They have mentioned homelessness in the House today. That is quite a shock and hypocritical. If we look at their housing plan, we see that it never mentions homelessness. They do not want to do anything on these things.

If someone wants to understand the compassion of the party opposite, and of its leader specifically, look at what the leader did a few months ago. He went to someone's home, stood in front of it and called it a shack. He said that about a member of the working

Oral Questions

class. That is the respect the Conservatives have for working people. They are not a serious party.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals made the decision to expand the Trans Mountain pipeline, which will result in seven times more tanker traffic in Burrard Inlet. People in Port Moody—Coquitlam, Anmore and Belcarra are at risk of evacuation, fire, smoke inhalation and carcinogens in the event of a spill. The Government of B.C. and the local health authorities are asking for a plan to protect people, yet the Liberals have no plan, and the Conservatives have no concern, to keep people safe.

What are the Liberals going to do to protect Canadians in my riding and beyond from a catastrophic spill?

Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is incredibly important that, as we move products to market, we do so in a safe and efficient manner. Certainly, the transporting of oil by pipeline is far safer than the transporting of oil by rail.

It is important, though, that we put in place measures to assure British Columbians and Canadians that this will be done safely. Enormous time was spent on ensuring that we put in place those provisions with respect to the pipeline and also with respect to marine shipping. The Canada Energy Regulator has played an important role in that. We will ensure that all of the safeguards are put into place and that the pipeline operates in a safe and efficient manner.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the poisoning of people in Grassy Narrows represents an unprecedented corporate crime. For over 60 years, the government has covered up and protected corporate criminality, and the result has been a never-ending nightmare for people suffering mercury poisoning that impacts everyone, including young children.

We now learn that the Dryden Fibre Canada mill has been dumping sulfates into the Wabigoon River. This has been driving the mercury crisis for a new generation. What steps will the Minister of Environment take to hold that company to account and work with the people of Grassy Narrows to finally clean up the disaster in the Wabigoon River?

• (1450)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is happening at Grassy Narrows is a tragedy, and all levels of government need to do better. Indigenous Services Canada is supporting several projects that will help meet the needs of the community without leaving home. Budget 2024 also provides an additional \$57.5 million for the construction of a mercury care home.

Oral Questions

The ongoing calamity and tragedy at Grassy Narrows is a reminder of what happens if we do not protect our water sources from pollution. That is also why we introduced the first nations clean water act, which would make sure first nations have tools to protect their water sources, and hold polluters accountable.

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WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Mr. Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in conversations, women more than men face being constantly interrupted. When women express their ideas, those ideas often go unrecognized until reiterated by a man. When women push back, they are seen as less likeable, and negative labels are disproportionately applied to them. It is critical now more than ever that men speak up to defend women's rights and underscore their support for lasting gender equality.

Can the Minister of Justice reiterate our government's support on the importance of male allyship and ways our government is addressing this issue?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am an ally and I am speaking up. I am speaking up about the epidemic of gender-based violence. I am speaking up about women having full control over their bodies and their reproductive rights. That includes the right to abortion and the right to free contraception.

When we as men make spaces for women's voices, we not only learn but we also help create better, more inclusive policies. I urge every man in the chamber, from every single party, to stand up and to be an ally. The fight for gender equality in this country is a fight for all of us.

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THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years of the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister, more Canadians are hungry and homeless. The government promised to end chronic homelessness in Canada by 2030. The Parliamentary Budget Officer found homelessness is getting worse, with chronic homelessness up 38%. The vast majority of homeless individuals in Canada, 80%, are homeless based purely on affordability reasons. The Prime Minister is just not worth the cost.

How can the government spend so much with such failing results?

Hon. Jenna Sudds (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a really hard time listening to the Conservatives on that side of the House profess concern for Canadians who are struggling, when we continue to see them vote against the measures that we put forward to support Canadians when they need us, such as efforts to support and strengthen the social safety net, like \$10-a-day child care, like moving forward with a national school food program and like moving forward with dental care to ensure they get the care that they need.

We will continue to fight for Canadians.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister needs to fight for Canadians by actually listening to them and talking to them, because after nine years of the Liberal-NDP Prime Minister, things have never been worse. Canadians are more hungry and they are homeless.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer confirmed what most Canadians already know, which is that homelessness has increased 38%, despite the Liberals' promising to end it. But, wait; it gets worse. This is from the front page of the Toronto Star: "City to prioritize larger homeless encampments in new strategy, as number of tents grows citywide".

When did the Prime Minister simply give up and say, "You know what, a tent is good enough"?

Hon. Jenna Sudds (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will say it once again: We see the Conservatives stand in the House and we hear them profess their support for Canadians, but I have to say that is not what we see day after day. When we put forward measures like the national school food program to ensure 400,000 more children have access to food at school, what do we see? We see the Conservatives vote against. We put forward the Canada child benefit, and what do we see? They vote against.

We will fight for—

• (1455)

The Speaker: The hon. member for South Shore—St. Margarets.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years, the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister is not worth the hunger and the homelessness.

The Prime Minister promised to end homelessness. What was the result of the posturing? Long-term homelessness is up 38%, because Canadians cannot afford a place to live. More Liberal help like this will produce greater misery for Canadians. The NDP-Liberal government does not understand that it cannot spend its way out of a problem.

When will the Liberals use common sense and realize that funding gatekeepers does not end homelessness?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a tragedy any time a Canadian does not have a roof over their head. It is unacceptable, and it is incumbent on all of us to live up to the challenge and to work together to make sure this is addressed in a way that is not politicized. However, the Conservatives are not capable of that, as we see.

Oral Questions

The member talks about funding gatekeepers. What he is really talking about is working with, for example, not-for-profit organizations. There is an acquisition fund that we worked on with not-for-profits to make possible \$1.5 billion. As a result, we will see that program move forward and units of housing kept affordable for everyday people. He is against it, as are the rest of the Conservatives.

Mr. Rick Perkins (South Shore—St. Margarets, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us take a look at the record that the Liberals are so proud of. The results are that the number of homeless in Halifax has grown from 284 in 2015 to over 1,200 now. The housing minister gave taxpayer money to Halifax to hire 30 more gatekeeper bureaucrats. After nine years of the NDP-Liberal Prime Minister, there are now over 30 homelessness encampments in Halifax.

Again, will the Liberals use common sense and realize that funding gatekeepers does not build homes?

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing, Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would point the member to the so-called housing plan of the Leader of the Opposition, which says nothing about homelessness. Therefore, the Conservatives can talk about this, but we know how serious they are; they are not serious at all.

The gatekeepers that the member talks about in this case are really municipal officials. They are mayors and councillors, for example, and others who have seen in Halifax; London, Ontario; Brampton and across the country 170-plus communities that understand that zoning changes are fundamental to getting more homes built, missing middle housing. Fourplexes, duplexes and triplexes would all be made possible, and they are against it.

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[Translation]

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today we are debating federal interference in the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces. One striking example concerns research chairs. The federal government is meddling in higher education and dictating which fields of study our universities must prioritize if they want to receive their share of funding.

Worse still, with its equity, diversity and inclusion, or EDI, criteria, Ottawa is deciding not only what people will study, but also who will teach it. Ottawa is literally taking over our universities.

Why does the government not let universities decide who to hire, based on their qualifications and nothing else?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, now I have seen it all. The Bloc Québécois is trying to pick a fight about science. We thought they had tried it in every field, but now they want a fight about science.

In the last budget, we invested \$3.5 billion in science across the country. This will help our researchers, professors and universities. The Bloc Québécois should be thrilled that we are investing in science and research. I know people watching at home are thrilled. We will continue to invest in science in this country.

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how thrilled people are about that, but at least they might find the minister's answers entertaining.

Yesterday, Isabelle Hachey, a first-rate journalist, gave the example of two job postings at the University of Waterloo for computer science professors. One of them is open only to gender and sexual minorities and the other is open only to racialized minorities, regardless of qualifications.

That reminds me of the posting for a biology professor at Laval University two years ago, which once again had nothing to do with qualifications. What was the university's response to that situation? It was to comply with the federal government's requirements. The federal government is out to lunch. One does not fight discrimination with discrimination.

When will the government put an end to these criteria that do more harm than good for diversity and inclusion?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the Quebecers who are watching at home right now are tearing out their hair. The Bloc Québécois is now trying to pick fights about science. Imagine that. I think that the Bloc members have come to the end of their playbook. They got to the last page and realized that they have not picked a fight about science in a long time.

On this side of the House, we are serious. We will continue to invest in our universities. We will continue to invest in our researchers. We will continue to attract our young people. We know that today's science is tomorrow's economy. We will continue to invest in our future.

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● (1500)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years of this Prime Minister, excessive spending and anti-agricultural policies are driving our farmers into bankruptcy. According to the Union des producteurs agricoles, one in five farms is no longer able to pay its debts.

With the help of the Bloc Québécois, the government is stifling our agricultural sector by blocking Bill C-234 and voting for centralizing and inflationary spending.

When will this Liberal-Bloc government give our farmers a break so they can feed our already hungry population?

Oral Questions

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party knows full well that the price on pollution does not apply in Quebec. The member also knows that all he has to do is walk up four rows and talk to the House leader of the official opposition if he wants Bill C-234 to pass in the House. The House leader of the official opposition controls the fate of this bill.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what a classic answer by the Liberal minister. The Liberals sit in their limousines, disconnected from reality, while Canadians are going hungry because of this Prime Minister and his Bloc Québécois partners. Clearly, they are not worth the cost.

In my riding, the number of people using food banks has reached a record high of one in four. In the past year, 10% of farms in the Chaudière-Appalaches region have shut down operations.

When will the government give our farmers the help they are desperately asking for?

Hon. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Minister of Tourism and Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am the minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, or CED. If there is one sector that CED has assisted in every region, including the regions of Quebec, it is agriculture. We supported agricultural processing and farm businesses in making the green transition to ensure that they also contribute to achieving net-zero emissions. CED is active in all regions of Quebec. We will continue to be there to help them through this transition.

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REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after nine years under the government of this Prime Minister, a growing number of Quebecers are hungry and living in the street. The inflation crisis hitting Canadians is the result of this government's centralist spending backed 100% by the Bloc Québécois. It makes me laugh a bit because the Bloc claims to defend the interests of Quebecers, but it voted for \$500 billion in inflationary budgetary allocations.

It is not just the Prime Minister who is not worth the cost. We have to include the Bloc in that.

Do the Bloc and the Liberals understand that more money for the federal government means less money for Quebecers?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can tell you one thing that the people watching us at home understand. They know that on this side of the House, we are prepared to invest in Canadians.

People know that the Conservative Party's plan is to make cuts to every program.

They had the nerve to rise today. Anyone who watched question period knows it. Every Conservative who rose today voted against the Canada child benefit. They are going to vote against the Canadian dental care plan; they are going to vote against the national school food program for 400,000 children.

I do not know how these people are able to look at themselves at night, but today we saw the Conservative Party's true colours.

* * *

[English]

HEALTH

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my province of Prince Edward Island has saved more than \$2 million in out-of-pocket costs since the launch of P.E.I.'s copay program last year. This federal funding for P.E.I. has improved access to prescription drugs and made them more affordable for Islanders. The success of this pilot can be replicated across the country.

Could the Minister of Health describe the impact that universal single-payer coverage for contraception and diabetes medication will have on the health of Canadians?

Hon. Mark Holland (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by commending the advocacy and work of the member for Charlottetown, who has been working tirelessly to make sure that Islanders get the coverage they need, saving them hundreds of dollars. Many times I have been out with him in Prince Edward Island over the last 10 months, talking to people about what that coverage means, not just for affordability but for prevention, to make sure they do not wind up with a chronic disease or illness.

The Conservatives say that it is too much for people to hope that they can get the medicine they need. They say that it is too much to hope that somebody can get the dental care they need. A hundred thousand people got dental care in just three weeks. We are getting it done.

* * *

● (1505)

ETHICS

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at his billion-dollar green slush fund, the Prime Minister's hand-picked chair is being investigated for lining her own pockets, and resigned in disgrace. After nine years of the NDP-Liberal government, the Prime Minister clearly is not worth the cost or that corruption.

However, another NDP-Liberal appointed director has been caught funnelling \$42 million to companies that she has stakes in. The Liberals knew it, but then they promoted her to the Infrastructure Bank anyway. She suddenly resigned. They gave her keys to a bigger mansion after burglarizing the first one.

Oral Questions

Will they investigate every dollar she handed out?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, now we are seeing the Conservative Party of Canada going after any company that works against climate change in our country. That is what those Conservatives are about. Behind these questions they are against new technologies to help fight climate change.

Those members know very well, and I have said it many times in the House, that the moment we heard about the allegation we launched an investigation. The chair has resigned; the CEO has resigned. We are investigating. We are going to make sure that every dollar that is spent is going to be well spent. We are going to restore governance, we are going to restore confidence and we are going to keep investing in Canadian companies.

Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we only see the minister get animated after people get caught, which is really too late.

The NDP-Liberal appointed chair and another director were caught stuffing their pockets full of taxpayer cash. They got caught; they resigned. They are being investigated. However, a third one, who was found to be furthering her own interests, was then appointed to the Infrastructure Bank, but suddenly resigned, much to the surprise of the minister responsible. This is life after nine years of the NDP-Liberal government. It has no idea where the money is going.

We need to protect Canadian tax dollars. Will the government call in the RCMP to investigate?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member just asked that same question, which the minister just answered.

However, while we are here and have some time, I want to know why a woman in Aurora, named Sabrina Maddeaux, and another woman, named Rachel Gilliland, are alleging things that do not seem quite kosher in Conservative nomination land. That is after accusations by Ms. Maddeaux of illegality in a Conservative nomination. They just happen to be the only two women in that nomination race. Why?

The Speaker: Order. I know that all members, especially all ministers, understand that when questions are asked, they should be about the administration of the government or the committees. It is the same thing that is expected of ministers, to respond to the administration of government.

The hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after the Prime Minister got caught turning a blind eye to Beijing's interference in our elections, his government was dragged kicking and screaming into calling a public inquiry. It has now been revealed that the Prime Minister and the cabinet are obstructing the work of the inquiry by refusing to turn over documents to the commissioner.

I have a simple question. Will the Prime Minister end the obstruction and turn over all documents requested by Madam Justice Hogue, unredacted, yes or no?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend knows very well that there is no obstruction at all. He should have a word with his House leader, with whom I worked very collaboratively all summer in setting up the Hogue Commission. We agreed to all the details of the terms of reference, including the fact that solicitor-client privilege and cabinet confidence were essential things that needed to be protected.

Of course, the people who served in Mr. Harper's government would know the attachment he had to those principles, but our government went a step further and made available cabinet documents that were relevant to this inquiry. We will continue to do everything necessary to allow it to do its work.

* * *

● (1510)

JUSTICE

Hon. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government stands proudly on the side of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, if elected, the official opposition could become the first federal government to create laws that would knowingly violate the rights of Canadians. It would do this by invoking the notwithstanding clause, trampling on our charter rights. As a parliamentarian, but even more as a Canadian, I find this simply chilling.

Will the Minister of Justice please elaborate on the importance of protecting the charter rights of Canadians?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the charter protects our right to free expression. It protects our right to worship whom we choose. It protects our right to equality. It protects our right to be presumed innocent.

If we stand for freedom, we do not get to cherry-pick which rights and freedoms we defend, but that is exactly what the Leader of the Opposition has said he would do. He has openly declared that he would use the notwithstanding clause to trample on these very charter rights. No federal leader has ever done this in Canadian history.

Our government enacted the charter, our government stands by the charter, and we will always defend the charter rights and freedoms of every Canadian.

*Business of the House***CANADA POST CORPORATION**

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, decades ago, the Liberals promised to stop the closure of rural post offices. However, in classic Liberal fashion, they have broken that promise year after year. We have lost 500 rural post offices since 1994, 33 last year alone. Before the Conservatives start heckling, their record when they were in government was even worse.

How many rural post offices are going to have to close before the minister finally does something?

Mr. Charles Sousa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question from the member opposite because he speaks to a very relevant issue that is affecting Canadians all across Canada, not just in his community but everywhere.

We are working closely with Canada Post to ensure that we change its ways so that we can improve delivery across the country. It is a serious issue; we recognize that. We are having deliberations over it. We are working closely with Canadians. We are going to be spending more time discussing how we can improve the operations of the organization to better serve Canada.

* * *

FINANCE

Mr. Kevin Vuong (Spadina—Fort York, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the Liberal government on achieving the highest interest rates in two decades, on the sustained high food prices that have not been seen since the 1980s and on reducing Canadian living standards to almost the lowest levels in 40 years.

Spread out over 20 years and beyond the next election, budget 2024 solves nothing. Yes, Canada has come a long way since 2015. Unfortunately, it is in the wrong direction.

Given the long list of failures, will the finance minister resign, take the entire cabinet with her, and go paint leadership posters for Mark Carney?

Hon. Anita Anand (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on keeping inflation low so that interest rates can come down. We have a fiscally responsible plan, and we will continue to maintain strong economic indicators, a AAA credit rating and the lowest net debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7, all while having supports for Canadians in budget 2024, such as affordable housing, such as ECE and early childhood learning, such as supports for a national school food program.

We have a comprehensive plan and we are compassionate.

* * *

• (1515)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it being Thursday, it is time for what some say is the most exciting part of the week.

I just want to point something out, and I hope the Minister of Public Safety hears this. It is important to note for the record that in

the MOU that set up the Hogue inquiry, during the discussions on that, requests were made by the official opposition to include very strict parameters about providing cabinet confidences to Justice Hogue. We were told we were in a take-it-or-leave-it position, so it is very disingenuous to now say it was the opposition that agreed to holding up cabinet confidences. Of course, we would have no reason to want or agree to that. That is an important thing to clarify.

As the Thursday question is related to the upcoming business of the House, I would like to ask the government House Leader this: What will the business be for the rest of this week and for next week, and can Canadians hope for some relief at the pumps? Will the government bring in legislation to remove all federal gas taxes, the carbon tax, the excise tax and the GST, off fuel so Canadians can afford a modest summer road trip?

As the government-caused inflation and interest rate crisis has taken such a big bite out of Canadians' paycheques, many are hoping just to be able to scrape enough together for their hotel bills and fuel bills. Taking the tax off fuel would go a long way towards providing Canadians an affordable summer vacation. Can members and Canadians expect any legislation that would provide them with that much-needed relief?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am always entertained by my hon. colleague across the aisle, with whom I work regularly. With gas at about \$1.50 a litre in Ontario, if I am not mistaken, it is a lot cheaper than it is in Alberta, where Premier Danielle Smith unilaterally hiked the cost of gasoline by 13¢. She did not provide, of course, the very substantial rebates on the price on pollution we have put on and that the Conservatives would take away.

Of course, that was not his question. Tomorrow, we will call Bill C-58, concerning replacement workers, at report stage and at third reading. On Monday, we will resume third reading debate of Bill C-49, the Atlantic accord implementation act.

[Translation]

Wednesday, we will begin debate at second reading of Bill C-70 on countering foreign interference, which is already a strong response to the issues being investigated by the Hogue commission. We will hear from the Minister of Public Safety at second reading of Bill C-70.

I would also like to inform the House that Tuesday and Thursday will be allotted days.

Finally, as is only proper, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent of the House for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any standing order, special order or usual practice of the House, during the debate on the business of supply pursuant to Standing Order 81(4) later today:

- (a) the time provided for consideration of the Main Estimates in committee of the whole be extended beyond four hours, as needed, to include a minimum of 16 periods of 15 minutes each;
- (b) members speaking during the debate may indicate to the Chair that they will be dividing their time with one or more other members; and
- (c) no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be received by the Chair.

The Speaker: All those opposed to the hon. minister's moving the motion will please say nay.

It is agreed.

The House has heard the terms of the motion. All those opposed to the motion will please say nay.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—FEDERAL INTRUSIONS IN THE EXCLUSIVE JURISDICTIONS OF QUEBEC AND THE PROVINCES

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, prior to question period getting under way, I said that, eventually, we will be in an election campaign. When that happens, I will love the contrast that we are going to share with Canadians of the difference between the Liberals and the Government of Canada and the “Reformers”, or the unholy alliance between the Conservatives-Reformers and the Bloc party. I say that in all sincerity, because there is a substantial difference.

In their alliance, the Bloc and the Conservatives show the same attitude toward federal spending on programs that are important to Canadians. They have in common the way they have voted and indicated their lack of support for national programs that are being supported in many different ways across the country. It is important for us to show that contrast. The closer we get to 2025 and an election, the more Canadians are going to see that contrast. I believe they are going to say they want and support the types of programs that reflect Canadian values. They want a government that is prepared to work with other levels of government to provide the types of services that Canadians expect parliamentarians to deliver.

On the one hand, we have the Reformers, who masquerade as the Conservatives in the House. On that side, it is cut, cut, cut, and then we have a government that recognizes investing in Canadians is good for all of Canada. I would like to amplify that statement by talking about some of the programs that we have brought in or that the budget is talking about.

Business of Supply

The Bloc brought forward a motion today that says, in essence, give us money or give us nothing. I understand that, because they are separatists. They want Canada to be broken up. They do not support Canada as a nation, the way it is today.

Let us talk about some of the programs. We have a national dental care program that is providing services in every region of our country. Seniors today are benefiting from that program. Children have benefited from the program. It is a program that continues to expand in every region of the country. We have political parties on the opposite side, the unholy alliance, saying that they are going to get rid of or that they do not support the Canada dental care plan, taking it away from seniors.

I would highlight, for example, that every member of Parliament has seniors in their ridings, on fixed incomes, who have registered for the program and are receiving services. The unholy alliance is prepared to get rid of that program. The Conservatives will say it is a cost factor; they do not believe we should be spending money on that particular issue. Then we have the Bloc saying that it is provincial jurisdiction and that Ottawa should not be entering into provincial jurisdiction. Both arguments have a great deal of myth to them. The fact of the matter is that this particular program, like other programs, has been developed through a great deal of consultation and working with Canadians, which is why we have it today.

• (1520)

Unfortunately, both of those opposition parties are voting against it. What they are really doing is putting party politics ahead of the needs of the constituents they represent.

Let us talk about the pharmacare program. It does not matter what area of the country or what province Canadians live in, if they are diabetic, they would receive free medical assistance through pharmaceuticals to deal with their diabetes. We are not talking about thousands of Canadians. We are talking about millions of Canadians who would benefit from that one aspect of the pharmacare program that is being introduced. However, once again, we have the Conservatives saying no to those constituents that they represent who are in need of that medication. One has to question why. What is the motivating factor behind it?

Again, what we see in that motivation is the Conservative's and the Bloc's attitudes towards health care. They do not believe that the federal government has any role in health care at all, with the exception of handing over money. Ottawa is nothing more than an ATM to them, and the only role Ottawa is to play is to give money to the provinces for health care.

It does not matter to them if a service is in one area of the country and not in another area of the country. They do not see the visionary policies that would provide pharmacare and dental care. Dental care is a health care service. Every year we have children who, because they are not getting the dental service that they require, end up in emergency rooms. Do members know how many times individuals with diabetes get amputations because they are not getting the proper medical supplies they need? It is all tied in to health care.

Business of Supply

Then we have the Bloc members, the separatists, who say that they just do not care about it. They are more concerned about dividing and breaking up the country. That is the role they play. I can appreciate, to a certain degree, that at least the Bloc members are transparent.

However, why would the Conservatives take that sort of an approach? They should talk to your constituents. I believe they would find that people love the health care that we provide today across Canada. It is a national program.

We have the Canada Health Act to protect the integrity of the system. We have a government that has invested hundreds of millions, actually, let me get it right, as we just committed in negotiations with provinces of \$198 billion. That is \$198 billion over the next 10 years to commit to Canada's health system, to deal with issues such as long-term care, mental health and many other issues, including labour-related issues. We are concerned about doctors and nurses, and many other aspects of health care, including the support workers who play such a critical role. We recognize that importance.

When I posed the question in the House of Commons to the leader of the Conservative-Reform Party earlier today, the response was exceptionally disappointing. All he did was reaffirm the degree to which the Conservative Party today has moved to the right and the people it is listening to.

• (1525)

The Conservatives do not believe in a health care system to the degree that we have it today. There is a hidden Conservative agenda. When we think of the health care we have today, we can look at the province of Saskatchewan and how it contributed to having a national health care system.

We now have a national child care system. We needed to look to the province of Quebec and what the province of Quebec provided, which ultimately led to us having a \$10-a-day national child care program. It is the benefit of a federation that we can take a look at what is working well and look at how we can turn things into a program so that all Canadians can benefit from it.

Whether someone lives in Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Edmonton, Halifax, Whitehorse or anywhere in between, we understand that there are national things that we can all treasure, whether they are programs such as OAS or employment insurance, which were brought in by prime ministers such as Mackenzie King, or the types of programs that the Prime Minister and the government, this collection of Liberal members of Parliament, continue to push for, day in and day out.

We are looking and listening to what our constituents are telling us, bringing that forward here to Ottawa, and developing policy that is going to help Canadians. Unfortunately, time and time again, we see opposition coming from the Bloc, in its breaking up the nation, and the Conservatives, who do not care about providing the type of social safety net that Canadians have grown to believe in and want to see expanded.

There is nothing wrong with being a government that cares with competence, and that is what the Prime Minister and the government have continuously delivered for Canadians.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I recognize my colleague's passion, but it is not always well directed.

I am going to read him two quotes, and I would like him to give me his opinion.

These are quotes from Lester B. Pearson, a Liberal prime minister, just like his. He said, "Although Quebec is a province in this Confederation, it is more than a province, for it is the home of a people: that is why it is fair to say that it is a nation within the nation."

He also said that we should take steps, arrangements, so that Quebec would have de facto power in the areas it wished to have under its authority. He said, "By imposing a centralism which, if acceptable to some provinces, was certainly not acceptable to Quebec, and by insisting that Quebec be [treated in a manner] similar to the other provinces, we could destroy Canada". A former prime minister said that.

Is my colleague aware that this is what he is doing?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the member himself is aware that I have many generations of family history in Canada, which goes back to the province of Quebec. One of my greatest regrets is that many individuals in western Canada lost the ability to speak French because of all sorts of issues. Ultimately, Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the initiatives he took ensured that the French language was being spoken more outside of the province of Quebec.

I have consistently, through my years as a parliamentarian, argued just how wonderful the French language is, how it contributes to the Canadian identity and how it makes the province of Quebec such a unique, loving place, not only to visit, but also to live in. Quebec, just like other provinces, contributes immensely. I made reference to the child care program. There are many aspects, including the culture and the arts.

The province of Manitoba and the province of Quebec share many things in common. On industry, I can talk about the aerospace industry. I can talk about hydro and concerns about the environment. There are all sorts of things that we do not have to tear down in the country to appreciate. I care for the province of Quebec as much as I care for other areas of Canada, and I will continue to fight and articulate why it is so critically important that Quebec lead not only Canada, but also North America, in the French language and the unique role that Quebec plays in ensuring that French will continue to be not only spoken, but also—

The Deputy Speaker: We will move on to the next question as we are running out of time.

The hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford has the floor.

Business of Supply

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is great to see the member for Winnipeg North stand in this place to loudly proclaim his support for the important programs of pharmacare and dental care. This is even more so due to the fact that, in the 43rd Parliament, when it came to Bill C-213, introduced by the member for New Westminster—Burnaby, and a motion on dental care, which was introduced by former MP Jack Harris, that member and the entire Liberal caucus voted against those measures. They voted against pharmacare and against dental care.

I am glad to see that, on the road to Damascus, the Liberals have arrived at their conversion. I just want to know what changed. What led the Liberals to suddenly have this vision that these were, in fact, the right programs to put in place now? Could it be that the New Democrats forced them to do it?

• (1535)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I get a flashback of being with my daughter Cindy, who is an MLA in the province of Manitoba, and I can recall us being on Keewatin Street, where we had these signs. We were saying that we wanted to have a national pharmacare program and that it would be wonderful to see the Province of Manitoba work with Ottawa to make that happen. I can recall a throne speech a few years back in which Ottawa made reference to the fact that we were looking for a willing province.

I like to think that, now that Manitoba has an NDP government, maybe we will get that much more sympathy for getting it. I have introduced many petitions over the years on the importance of a pharmacare program. I have spoken to it inside the House on many occasions.

Am I glad that it is here? I am glad. I believe the NDP also played an important role in it, and I give them credit for that, but I think that there are members of Parliament on all sides of the House, although maybe not among the Conservatives, but possibly, who support the idea of having a national pharmacare program, because it makes a whole lot of sense.

When I was in the Manitoba legislature, I was the health care critic. I can tell members that a national pharmacare program, especially if one gets the provinces working with Ottawa, could really do some wonderful things. It would be to the betterment of all of us.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I refer the parliamentary secretary to Confederation in 1867. The historical compromise was to have assemblies that were equally sovereign in their respective areas of jurisdiction. However, listening to the parliamentary secretary's speech, what we see is nothing but interference. All he is doing is justifying the interference, and he is breaking this agreement of a federation made up of equally sovereign assemblies.

In the end, does he want to have a legislative union, a centralized government with an Ottawa-knows-best attitude that dictates to the provinces, who are mere administrators?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I would not want the member to put words in my mouth. What I am suggesting is that the people of Canada, no matter what region of the country they live in, appreciate it when governments work together. I would ultimately argue that, when governments work together, one gets better results.

On jurisdiction, we have the Canada Health Act. The Canada Health Act is something that ensures that there is a national health care system from coast to coast to coast. I believe that the majority of people in Canada today support the need for the Canada Health Act.

We need to be more appreciative of the many different things that the different regions have to offer and recognize the uniqueness of the different provincial entities. Obviously, Quebec stands out because of that sense of French uniqueness and the culture, arts and heritage of the province of Quebec.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, earlier, when I read the quotes to my colleague, I thought he would understand them. After all, they seem pretty clear to me. Now, since he does not seem to have understood them, I am going to explain them to him.

There have already been Canadian prime ministers who recognized Quebec's specificity and areas of jurisdiction, and who accepted or offered the right to opt out with full compensation, so when my colleague tells me that we want to tear the country apart, that is not true. We are not going to tear the country apart, we want to build our own, which is very different. When my colleague tells me that Canada is a great country, I tell him that, if we were really part of this country, we would be respected here, and if we were respected here, so would our skills and the powers of our national government.

What does he think about that? He probably will not have understood much of what I have just said, but I can start over.

• (1540)

The Deputy Speaker: This is a question and comment period. Members can give answers or make comments.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I did understand the question. Let us take a look at William Mackenzie King; prior to Mackenzie King becoming the Prime Minister of Canada, there was a great deal of discussion about pensions. The pensions were, in fact, at one point in time, provincial jurisdiction. Mackenzie King came in and then ultimately worked with the province to develop a national program, and today we have the OAS system. I believe a vast majority of Canadians like the old age system we have, which provides a monthly income and keeps a lot of seniors out of a poverty situation.

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today's motion reads as follows:

That the House:

- (a) condemn the federal government's repeated intrusion into the exclusive jurisdictions of Quebec, the provinces and the territories;
- (b) remind the Prime Minister that, despite his claims, it is not true that "people do not care which level of government is responsible for what"; and
- (c) demand that the government systematically offer Quebec, the provinces and territories the right to opt out unconditionally with full compensation whenever the federal government interferes in their jurisdictions.

I do not know what my colleagues think of this, but it feels like déjà vu to me.

Let us start at the beginning. The Constitution Act, 1867, divides up federal and provincial jurisdiction in sections 91 and 92. It is just a list, kind of a shopping list. However, the federal government's history of attempting to legislate in areas under provincial jurisdiction is impressive. How much money has been wasted on needless, fruitless and even harmful legal wrangling and pseudo-negotiations?

Our courts have had many opportunities to remind us of the terms of the Constitution in which the federal government constantly drapes itself but systemically disrespects. I have a suggestion to make to members of the government, which is to reread sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution Act, 1867. They are only two pages long, and they are in both French and English.

Secondly, on the subject of authority, a reference relating to securities law was handed down in 2011 by the Supreme Court of Canada. The federal government should go back and read the explanations given by the judges in this decision as to how the division of powers works. I will mention just three.

Paragraph 119 says, "Inherently sovereign, the provinces will always retain the ability to resile from an interprovincial scheme". Paragraph 119 also states, "it is in the nature of a federation that different provinces adopt their own unique approaches consistent with their unique priorities when addressing social or economic issues."

The third example is found in paragraph 71:

The Canadian federation rests on the organizing principle that the orders of government are coordinate and not subordinate one to the other. As a consequence, a federal head of power cannot be given a scope that would eviscerate a provincial legislative competence. This is one of the principles that underlies the Constitution...

The Supreme Court said that. It was not the first time.

In 1919, the Supreme Court's decision in *In Re The Initiative and Referendum Act* stated that the purpose of the Constitution Act, 1867, was:

not to weld the Provinces into one, nor to subordinate Provincial Governments to a central authority, but to establish a Central Government in which these Provinces should be represented, entrusted with exclusive authority only in affairs in which they had a common interest. Subject to this each Province was to retain its independence and autonomy....

The Constitution is clear. The Supreme Court has said this many times. I just quoted from two decisions, but the current federal gov-

ernment does not seem to understand these simple principles, which a first-year law student would easily understand.

We are now seeing multiple intrusions and attempted intrusions. Look at pharmacare. Quebec's system has room for improvement, but it does exist. The federal government should transfer the money instead of creating a new costly and inefficient structure.

● (1545)

As in the case of pharmacare, Quebec already has a public dental insurance system, managed by the Régie de l'assurance maladie du Québec. We agree that it could be improved, but the federal government is determined to create its own parallel system. If the money were transferred to the provinces with no strings attached, these plans could be upgraded. Instead, the government is going to spend money to create conflicting and sometimes overlapping provisions.

The federal renters' bill of rights is a new scheme devised this spring. Announced in late March, this bill of rights would require landlords to disclose rent histories. It would also crack down on renovictions and establish a standard, national lease template, among other things. However, jurisdiction over property and civil rights, as set out in subsection 92(13) of the Constitution Act, 1867, is assigned exclusively to Quebec and the provinces. Yesterday, in fact, Quebec's minister of municipal affairs and housing introduced Bill 65 in the National Assembly. The bill aims to regulate evictions by imposing a three-year moratorium. Quebec is doing what it must. The minister said this morning on the Radio-Canada program *Tout un matin* that the federal government should simply look after its own responsibilities, like the out-of-control temporary immigration that is driving up the demand for housing.

Another type of intrusion is the promise to challenge Quebec's state secularism law. On June 16, 2019, the Quebec National Assembly passed Bill 21, which seeks to ensure that all Quebecers have the freedom to practise and display their religious convictions without the state expressing any preference whatsoever. That is what is known as secularism. The Quebec state is secular both in spirit and in letter. It must be secular in both word and deed, demonstrating its secularism through its representatives. How is this the federal government's business? Why is the current federal government not only promising to challenge this legislation before the Supreme Court, but also funding the various legal challenges it is facing? This is clearly interference in provincial jurisdictions, and it explains, in part, the motion before us today.

Beyond respect for jurisdictions, what about respect for the motions of the House?

On June 16, it will be three years since the House of Commons adopted the following motion, and I quote:

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

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Since then, the federal Minister of Justice has still not entered in his administrative codification Quebec's changes to section 90, regarding language and nation, and to section 128, regarding the oath to the King. I would point out that this codification is mainly used by judges, lawyers and other court officials. The Government of Quebec has updated its codification, which incorporates the changes made by Quebec and Saskatchewan. What is the federal government waiting for?

Respect for jurisdictions also involves respect for motions that call upon the government to acknowledge the actions taken by various governments in their areas of jurisdiction. I would like someone to explain the reason for this oversight. For now, only Quebec has an up-to-date codification of the Constitution Act.

At the beginning of April, the Prime Minister said that people do not really care which level of government is responsible for what. A Leger poll released on April 19 tells us that 80% of Quebecers believe that governments must respect their respective areas of jurisdiction and that 74% of them believe that Ottawa must get the agreement of the provinces before it intervenes in their areas of jurisdiction. Quebecers, like Canadians across the country, certainly want affordable rent and groceries, but I do not recall anyone talking about chaos.

• (1550)

My time is up. I would still have much to say. Perhaps I will continue in my response to questions, if there are any.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the member focused a great deal of his speech on the constitutional element. I want to go back to the constituents he represents. Does the member believe that the dental program that is in place, the school food program that is being rolled out and pharmacare, which is going to provide medication for people with diabetes, are programs the member will not support because of his position with respect to the Constitution? Would he deny his constituents those program benefits?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I would say that in Rivière-du-Nord, as in the rest of Quebec and probably across Canada, everyone is happy to have social measures that help people. However, no one is happy when that is done in such circumstances, where there is no respect for anyone in this House.

When we stand up and ask the government to respect us, we are told that we like picking fights. That is all this government is capable of doing in response to our requests to respect jurisdictions.

Do we agree? Are we happy with this dental plan? No. We want the money to be transferred to Quebec, which already has a dental plan. We do not want measures that overlap or contradict each other. One captain per boat is enough.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I always find it a little odd that the greatest defenders of the Canadian Constitution in the House are the members of the Bloc Québécois. It makes no sense how much they like the Canadian Constitution.

There is no duplication of dental care programs, because the Quebec plan does not include dental care for seniors. The Quebec plan does not include dental care for teens. It also does not cover people with disabilities. We are talking about helping 4 million Quebecers.

When there is no discussion or negotiation with the provinces, the Bloc Québécois members get all worked up, and rightly so. However, while we have a pharmacare plan that lays the groundwork for negotiation and discussion with the provinces, the Bloc Québécois whip told us yesterday that there was no deadline, that it was taking too long and there were too many discussions.

What I would like to know is this: Do they want discussions or not?

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Speaker, the answer is that we do not want discussions. There is nothing to negotiate in the Constitution. It has been signed for 150 years. It is important to remember that. Everyone should reread it and it should be respected.

Health is a provincial jurisdiction. The government needs to transfer the money to Quebec, the provinces and the territories, and stop meddling in areas that are none of its business. That way, there will be no more bickering. Let us stop wasting time and be efficient. People will love us. They will love the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, me and all my colleagues in the House.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the speeches by my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois from the start. I have a very simple question.

We agree with the motion as it is moved today. We think that the Liberal government interferes massively in provincial jurisdictions. When I listen to the speeches and when I see the actions of my Bloc Québécois colleagues, I tell myself that it is six of one and half a dozen of the other. Essentially, what the Bloc Québécois wants is to have full responsibility, but also the power to spend the same money and ability to tax Quebecers more.

I would like my colleague to explain to me what difference today's motion will make in a Quebec that might be led by the leader of the Bloc Québécois.

• (1555)

Mr. Rhéal Éloi Fortin: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that the leader of the Bloc Québécois has any designs on leading Quebec, but we shall see. I will leave it to him to respond to that.

We do not want to further tax people in order to provide them services. We want efficiency. We want every penny paid by Quebecers in taxes, whether to Quebec City or Ottawa, to be used 100% efficiently. There is a captain of health and that is Quebec's health minister. Transfer money to him and let him manage it. If he does not manage it properly, then I can guarantee that Quebecers will be there to tell him, to call him out and to get rid of him in the next election.

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That is how it is done. We must not get involved in what is happening in other people's sandboxes.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, with its latest budget, the federal government has launched an unprecedented attack against Quebec and the provinces' powers. We saw it coming with the striptease leading up to the budget, when the Prime Minister, worthy successor of his dear old dad, proclaimed that Canadians did not care about jurisdictional matters. Although the federal government has always tried to centralize powers, this time they are doing so without reserve, without restraint and without shame.

Let us take housing, for example. While, on the one hand, the government has finally recognized the crisis and is proposing positive measures, on the other, it is taking advantage of the situation to launch an unprecedented centralist offensive. According to the budget, it is now in charge of everything related to housing, the provinces and municipalities being relegated to the position of executors of federal priorities.

For example, the government is forcing the provinces to sign an agreement by next January. According to the budget, if Quebec rejects the conditions set by know-it-all Ottawa or argues that it has different priorities, the federal government will ignore Quebec or any recalcitrant province and will negotiate directly with the municipalities. This approach is illegal in Quebec. In fact, since a decision rendered by Robert Bourassa's government in 1971, Quebec's municipalities cannot transact directly with Ottawa. The goal is to prevent the federal government from adopting a divide-and-conquer approach, and from diminishing Quebec's negotiating power at the bargaining table.

The federal government is encroaching on municipalities' urban development plans by imposing specific requirements for receiving infrastructure transfers. It is going so far as to establish the height and density of residential neighbourhoods within an 800-metre radius of educational institutions and public transportation routes. If the cities do not authorize the construction of certain types of multi-plexes in these sectors, they will not be entitled to federal transfers.

The government is also encroaching on property tax rights by announcing a tax on vacant lots in urban areas. Lastly, it intends to purchase land from the provinces and municipalities and lease it long-term to developers to construct buildings. Since these constructions will be built on federal land, they will automatically be exempt from municipal bylaws and provincial laws. This is a significant risk.

The budget is full of interference in Quebec's areas of jurisdiction that will cause repeated disputes concerning jurisdiction and delay service delivery to Canadians. In addition to housing, the federal government is interfering in health care with the announcement of a bill on Canada-wide standards for long-term care and with its prescription drug and dental insurance plans. The same is true in education.

Ottawa has announced a lot of money for the energy transition. The budget explains how it will be distributed. The private sector and western Canada will receive generous subsidies and credits for carbon capture and nuclear energy development. In terms of compensation, Ottawa is offering a 15% tax credit to publicly owned

corporations like Hydro-Québec for developing green projects. However, the federal government is going even further by interfering in how provincial publicly owned corporations are run. For example, it is imposing conditions on Hydro-Québec's rates. The publicly owned corporation can have the 15% tax credit for investments in its projects only if it complies with the federal government's conditions. Ottawa is forcing Hydro-Québec to use it to reduce electricity bills and publicly report how the tax credit has improved ratepayers' bills.

The budget is a demonstration of the effects of the fiscal imbalance. Jurisdictions no longer exist in the eyes of the federal government. With this budget, the Prime Minister is declaring himself the Prime Minister of Canada, the premier of every province and the mayor of every town. Since the Liberals are busy messing around in Quebec's jurisdictions like sorcerers' apprentices, we are entitled to ask who is taking care of federal responsibilities like managing the borders or employment insurance, which is badly in need of a long-awaited reform. This budget was made on the backs of Quebeckers. It is a clear demonstration of the damage that can be caused by the combination of the fiscal imbalance and the federal government's spending power by reducing Quebeckers' ability to manage their own society themselves.

The Bloc Québécois presented its requests to the government. It asked that the government provide support for seniors, give Quebec the right to opt out when it comes to federal interference, address the housing crisis, pay Quebec back for the money it spent helping asylum seekers and put an end to its oil worship. The budget does not address any of those things. There is also not one word about the aerospace policy that the government promised. Quebec's \$11-billion deficit caused quite a stir, but people seem fine with Ottawa's \$40-billion deficit.

• (1600)

Ottawa's continued interference is resulting in an unprecedented centralization of power that robs Quebeckers of the ability to evolve in accordance with their needs, strengths, characteristics and desires. Centralization is a trend dating back to the dawn of Confederation, but we must not forget that, in 1867, our nation agreed to be part of Canada on the condition that the federal model recognized two equal levels of government sovereign in their respective jurisdictions.

Ottawa's conditional transfers and interference are eroding Quebec's autonomy. Quebec is supposed to be completely sovereign in areas under its exclusive jurisdiction. Quebeckers agreed to the Constitution of 1867 on that condition, but it is this very principle that is being challenged by the almighty spending power. Every time Ottawa sets up a program or spends money in an area that Quebec is supposed to be in charge of, Canada decides how Quebec society will be organized. Every time Ottawa sets conditions before transferring funds to Quebec, it forces the Government of Quebec to act on Canadians' priorities rather than Quebeckers' priorities. As the Séguin report on the fiscal imbalance noted, these transfers or expenditures always "limit the decision-making and budgetary autonomy of the provinces in their fields of jurisdiction".

More and more, as a result of the fiscal imbalance and its offshoot, spending power, the Quebec government is being relegated to the ranks of a federal government subcontractor. That is true in almost every sector. Again I quote the Séguin report:

Given the amounts in question, federal intervention through the “federal spending power” has a considerable impact on provincial policy in the provinces’ fields of jurisdiction because the use of the “federal spending power” affects practically every one of the provinces’ fields of jurisdiction.

What about the Quebec nation in all this? The House of Commons recognizes that the Quebec nation exists. That is good. However, recognizing a nation is more than just a symbolic gesture. Nations, like people, have fundamental rights, the most important being the right to control the social, economic and cultural development of their own society, in other words, the right to self-determination. Two former premiers of Quebec, a federalist and a sovereignist, Robert Bourassa and René Lévesque, agreed on this issue.

In 1980, René Lévesque said:

Having all the attributes of a distinct national community, Quebec has an inalienable right to self-determination. It is the most fundamental right the people of Quebec possess.

In 1990, when he gave a speech in the Quebec National Assembly following the failure of the Meech Lake accord, Robert Bourassa said:

English Canada must clearly understand that no matter what anyone says or does, Quebec is and always will be a distinct and free society capable of taking charge of its own destiny and its own development.

The federal government cannot recognize the Quebec nation and its right to make choices that are different from Canada’s and then turn around and deny that nation the ability to assert that right by maintaining the federal spending power. Denying Quebec the power to spend undermines its very existence as a nation. Instead of Quebecers being masters in their own house, the federal government is acting like it is the master everywhere.

We will have a choice. We can let the federal government and the neighbouring nation dictate their priorities from the top down and decide our societal choices for us with our own money, or we can choose to fully assume our sovereignty. In the meantime, I urge the members of the House to vote in favour of this motion:

That the House: (a) condemn the federal government’s repeated intrusion into the exclusive jurisdictions of Quebec, the provinces and the territories; (b) remind the Prime Minister that, despite his claims, it is not true that “people do not care which level of government is responsible for what”; and (c) demand that the government systematically offer Quebec, the provinces and territories the right to opt out unconditionally with full compensation whenever the federal government interferes in their jurisdictions.

• (1605)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think of the national disability program that is being rolled out here in Canada, the dental program that is here in Canada and the pharmacare program, in particular for people with diabetes, and I know for a fact that there will be many people, hundreds if not potentially thousands of constituents whom the member currently represents who would benefit from those programs. Is the member suggesting that the federal government should just cancel

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those programs and hope and pray that every province in Canada brings in its own programs?

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this is the centralizing, Ottawa-knows-best attitude of telling the provinces what to do and how to act. First, Ottawa cuts health transfers and underfunds health care. Then it tells the provinces that they are mismanaging their affairs because health care is underfunded due to the fiscal imbalance, so it creates its own parallel programs.

When Quebec’s health transfers were cut, the province managed to create a partial pharmacare program for the less fortunate who were not covered. It is really limited, but with limited resources, it has had an exceptional impact not seen anywhere else in Canada. Now Ottawa has decided to create its own program. It did not sit down with Quebec to recognize that the province has its own program under its jurisdiction and tell Quebec that it will respect that and help improve its program. It did not ask what it could do to improve it. It did not ask if it could transfer the money to Quebec.

No, it did none of that. It just worked in isolation. The government is encroaching on provincial jurisdictions, it is developing a new program that overlaps with the existing one, and there is no harmonization. That is how Ottawa works. The king does not listen to his subjects. It is appalling.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the socialist approach of the Bloc Québécois, the Liberal Party and the NDP involves out-of-control spending at the expense of Quebecers and all Canadians.

This approach has increased the size of the bureaucracy in Canada by 100,000 people over the past 10 years. The result is a significant drop in quality of life.

Can the Bloc member tell us what his party really wants? Is it more money and more spending, which will put us all in a deep hole?

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, what we want is for the government to take responsibility. We want it to spend every dollar it takes from taxpayers effectively.

That is why we are telling it that, instead of interfering in the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces—which is the focus of today’s motion—it should use its public servants, existing resources, and the taxes it collects to do its own job properly.

Take employment insurance, for example. Is it socialist to want an employment insurance system that works? Right now, only four out of 10 people who lose their jobs can get insurance. No private insurer would have any policies if its insurance was that ineffective. This jurisdiction belongs exclusively to the federal government, but it is doing a very poor job of looking after it. That is what we are saying. We are asking the government to spend every dollar wisely.

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Because of the fiscal imbalance, provinces like Quebec are not getting enough money for the public services they have to deliver. Half of every tax dollar is spent on these services, yet half of the public's needs are not being met. What we are asking is that the government look after health, education and social services transfers.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we wanted to improve the motion that was moved earlier.

I moved an amendment to reaffirm the principle of co-operative federalism, where the federal government must work with the provinces in a way that respects the jurisdictions recognized in the Constitution, and to demand that the government work co-operatively with all levels to meet the needs of citizens while systematically offering Quebec the right to opt out unconditionally whenever the federal government interferes in its jurisdiction. At the end, the amendment proposed that we recognize the fact that 600,000 seniors in Quebec have already registered for dental care and that labour groups welcome the development of a universal public pharmacare plan. That is a fact.

His House leader refused to accept the amendments I moved. Which parts does he not agree with?

• (1610)

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Speaker, I was not aware of this proposed amendment, so I am not in a position to fully criticize or justify the proposed amendment that was just raised.

I would say that, in general, these elements are included in the spirit of our motion. As far as the dental care and pharmacare programs are concerned, the Bloc Québécois's position is that jurisdictions must be respected. Why did Ottawa not give Quebec the right to opt out with full compensation so that it could take care of the programs?

I would remind the House that the dental care program will be administered by Sun Life, a multinational insurance company that charges \$2 billion in administration fees. In Quebec, the existing program for children is administered by the public sector.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the motion moved by the member for Jonquière, the Bloc Québécois critic for intergovernmental affairs, natural resources and energy. I would like to inform the House that I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Cambridge.

Our government has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to working collaboratively with Quebec while recognizing its specificity in its priority areas. There are many examples of collaborative approaches our government successfully implemented in partnership with the Government of Quebec. These include child care, health care, housing, infrastructure and high-speed Internet.

I will give a few concrete examples of the constant effort our government has made to work in collaboration with the Government of Quebec, in the interest of Quebec, and with the interests of Quebecers at heart. My first example has to do with the early childhood sector. The signing of an asymmetrical agreement with

Quebec for this sector provided for the allocation of nearly \$6 billion between 2021 and 2026 to make improvements to Quebec's system. In that agreement, our government highlighted the trailblazing nature of the Quebec government's reduced-contribution educational child care services program, created in 1997 for children under five. I was living in Gatineau at the time, where I had a daughter, and I was able to benefit from this extraordinary service for Quebecers.

Quebeckers are proud of their educational child care system and, as I said, they have every reason to be. In addition to using it as a model—and we have—to guide our efforts to implement a pan-Canadian early learning and child care system in all the other provinces and territories, our government is making a significant contribution to supporting and improving Quebec's system, and we are doing so through our investments. When it comes to our governments' responsibilities, citizens across the country expect action to be taken to address the current concerns we are facing.

Let us talk about housing, which is an excellent example at the moment, and one that is very much ongoing, even in my community of Orleans, which I represent. As we all know, housing is one of the main concerns of young people and families across the country. It is in this context that our government has made unprecedented investments to reduce the number of Quebec households in need of housing. One of the ways we have achieved this is by financially supporting Quebec's initiatives to accelerate the construction of residential housing and meet Quebec's housing needs.

As one concrete example, our government contributed \$900 million to Quebec last year through the housing accelerator fund to expedite the construction of residential housing in Quebec. The Quebec government also invested \$900 million, bringing the combined total value of the two governments' envelope to \$1.8 billion in new funding available for housing construction.

These investments are expected to directly create 8,000 new social and affordable housing units, 500 of which will be reserved for people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It is important to recognize that our two governments share common goals like reducing the number of Quebec households with housing needs. In order to come to an agreement, we showed flexibility, particularly by recognizing that Quebec has been administering projects with municipalities and other stakeholders through the Société d'habitation du Québec for nearly 50 years.

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• (1615)

How have we actually shown that we are flexible? The federal government granted Quebec a set level of funding based on its demographic weight in the Canadian population, and it did so with the Government of Quebec, not the municipalities, as is the case elsewhere in Canada. Among other things, the terms of the agreement ensured that the Government of Quebec could define the terms applicable to Quebec municipalities, with the goal shared by our government to remove development obstacles and build more housing faster by reducing construction times. The agreement between Canada and Quebec on the housing accelerator fund has been a success in Quebec.

I would like to share another example of our commitment to work hand in hand with Quebec to recognize Quebec's forward-thinking contribution to addressing a number of public policy challenges. I would like to give the example of the Canada-Quebec agreement to address gender-based violence, which will provide \$97.3 million for fiscal years 2023-24 to 2026-27.

With this agreement, we recognized the key role that Quebec plays through its integrated government strategy to address sexual violence. By recognizing Quebec's level of commitment through its strategy, the federal and Quebec objectives came together to address sexual violence and domestic violence in order to meet the various needs of population groups who experience gender-based violence.

The concerted efforts of our two governments have resulted in many collaborative agreements in which we recognized Quebec's specificity and its unique ways of doing things. Of those agreements, I would like to draw members' attention to the one on public safety and fighting the scourge of gun violence. Our government was able to count on Quebec's leadership, through its provincial police force especially, to bring together all of the stakeholders.

So far, I have talked about the collaborative efforts that our government has made to respond to the challenges that Quebecers, like other Canadians, are facing. I would also like to talk about how working with the Government of Quebec has given us opportunities to develop the economy and help Quebecers prosper.

I want to take the few minutes that I have left to talk about the major investments that the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec made to support the development of the electric vehicle battery sector in Quebec. Thanks to joint investments from both governments, Canada has been able to attract major investors in battery materials processing and battery cell manufacturing. Take, for example, the \$2.7-billion investment that led the Swedish company Northvolt to set up shop in Montérégie, Quebec. With Northvolt, governments and businesses have invested no less than \$15 billion in Quebec's battery sector and that will create at least 6,000 jobs.

I will give a few more examples because I still have a few minutes left. Let us also look at the federal government's investment in the GM-POSCO battery materials manufacturing plant, which is estimated at \$600 million, and our investment in the establishment of a copper foil manufacturing plant in Granby to create and maintain 200 highly skilled jobs.

I could talk about this at length because we are looking to work together with the Quebec government, not cause bickering in the House of Commons. That is very important for me because, even though I currently represent the riding of Orléans and I am proud of it, I grew up in Gatineau, Quebec. My parents and many Gatineau residents have told me that having access to dental care has improved their quality of life.

I know that people here in the House are always stubborn about areas of jurisdiction, but I can say that our government is working very well and very closely with the Government of Quebec to meet the objectives of Quebecers and Canadians, to improve their quality of life, in an economic situation that is very difficult at the moment.

I will conclude by saying that we will continue to be there for Quebecers. We will continue to work in collaboration with the Quebec government. I am very proud to have given this speech today.

• (1620)

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what we are hearing here is shocking. Earlier, the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie said that the Bloc Québécois is the party that cares the most about the Constitution. I almost died laughing. It is not about caring about the Constitution; it is about efficiency.

My colleague just talked about housing. She said things are going well with Quebec. People are talking and listening to each other. When the big, important national housing strategy was launched in 2017, it took three years for the government to release those funds and start building housing in Quebec.

The housing accelerator fund came along in 2022. The \$1.8-billion agreement with Quebec—\$900 million from Quebec and \$900 million from Ottawa—took two years to negotiate. In the meantime, money was being spent all over Quebec.

Yesterday, the Parliamentary Budget Officer said that the national housing strategy was supposed to cut chronic homelessness in half. Well, it has doubled in the past five years. If the government's measures were working, we would know it.

I would like to know what my colleague thinks of what the Parliamentary Budget Officer said yesterday about how it would take an extra \$3.5 billion a year to solve Canada's homelessness problem.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, I always have to wonder when our Bloc Québécois colleagues ask questions. We are making investments. I just spoke about a housing agreement between Canada and the Government of Quebec. Is he trying to say that it is not enough? Is it too much? I do not know.

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What I can say is that we have sat down with Quebec to negotiate our agreements from the start. In the case of housing, the agreement is \$1.8 billion between our two governments. It will lead to the construction of more than 8,000 new housing units, including 500 for persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Once again, our debates here in the House of Commons are very important for Canadian democracy. We must not lose sight of the fact that we are here to represent Canada and Quebec. Our government works with the Government of Quebec to achieve our objectives.

[*English*]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I think about the fact that many of us in the House, even those who have been here a decade or more, are seeing things happening in the community that they have not experienced before: homelessness, a poisoned drug supply, lack of income and more than a quarter of Canadians with a disability. We are dealing with serious issues and serious problems. I know there has been much discussion about what is being funded.

When does the Liberal government start looking at the good ideas that are coming out? For example, if we talk about Quebec and child care, I know that Quebec has a livable income pilot going right now. When will the Liberal government start taking ideas that it knows are working for provinces?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, we often borrow ideas from Quebec, because they are often very forward thinking.

For a number of years, the province of Quebec has had a price on carbon. It is a separate system that is fantastic for countering the harmful effects of climate change. My colleague spoke about child care. We drew inspiration from the Quebec system in order to benefit all Canadians.

We will always work closely with Quebec, while creating federal programs to help all Canadians.

• (1625)

[*English*]

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked previously about the major challenges Canadians are facing across this country, including some things we have never seen before, or at least with some of the highest numbers in some of those measurable. In that vein, I think that Canadians are looking for us to work together with provinces and territories.

Of course, it is really about a team Canada approach to these major challenges that we are facing. Could the member speak to that?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, team Canada also includes the provincial team with the Government of Quebec. That has been the case since we took office in 2015. Personally, I entered provincial politics first, and I have been a member of Parliament since 2019.

What I want to talk about is the massive investment of an additional \$200 billion to improve health care in Canada. This will allow Quebecers to have better health care. We know that there are still a lot of challenges in this area. The Province of Quebec and the Government of Canada will come to an agreement to improve health care services for Quebecers, and I am proud of that.

We will continue to work not only with Quebec, but with all the provinces on this issue.

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 Saanich—Gulf Islands, Electoral Reform; the hon. member for Port Moody—Coquitlam, Persons with Disabilities; the hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton, Ethics.

[*English*]

Mr. Bryan May (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business and to the Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am thankful for the opportunity to take part in today's debate.

I will cut to the chase. Condemning the federal government's interference in the jurisdiction of provinces and territories is not only incredibly flawed but also quite unfair. If anything, Canada's unique federal structure gives provinces and territories more autonomy to implement programs and policies that work best for their inhabitants, while simultaneously giving them a platform to leverage their strengths so that they can shine on the world stage. This is a win-win situation that allows Canadians, including Quebecers, to reap a myriad of social and economic benefits, unlike anywhere else. I look forward to elaborating further on this point for my hon. colleagues.

Canadians in every region and of all ages benefit from the federal government's fiscally responsible and people-driven economic plan. Thanks to our historic Canada-wide early learning and child care plan, we are reducing fees for regulated child care by 50% on average, and we will be delivering regulated child care that costs an average of just \$10 a day by 2026.

This is a great example of collaboration between the federal government and the provinces and territories. To date, eight provinces and territories have already reduced child care fees to \$10 a day or less, and we are strengthening the affordable child care system that is already in place in Quebec by helping to create more child care spaces.

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Our investments in affordable, good-quality child care have helped to reach historic highs in terms of working-age women's participation in the workforce. We are also supporting about 3.5 million families annually through the tax-free Canada child benefit, with parents receiving up to \$7,437 per child under the age of six and up to \$6,275 per child aged six through 17 this year. This is helping to fight poverty across the country.

What is more, we will continue to work with provinces, territories and indigenous partners as we launch a national school food program. This would expand access to existing school food programs and help 400,000 more children per day get good, healthy food, so they can have a fair start and good health.

All the while, we have increased old age security benefits for seniors aged 75 and older by 10% as of July 2022, which is providing more than \$800 in additional support to full pensioners. Our government has gone even further to make life more affordable for those Canadians who need it the most, including by doubling the GST credit for six months in the fall of 2022 and by delivering a one-time grocery rebate in July 2023.

We also delivered the first enhanced quarterly Canada workers' benefit payment on July 28, 2023, to our lowest-paid and often most essential workers, with a family receiving a total benefit of up to \$2,616 last year. Our new Canadian disability benefit will increase fiscal well-being of low-income Canadians with disabilities in every region of the country.

On top of the laundry list of measures I just mentioned, we are also working with the provinces and territories to deliver improved health care to Canadians. Last year, we committed nearly \$200 billion over 10 years to strengthen public health care for Canadians, including record health transfers and tailored bilateral agreements. This year, we introduced legislation to launch the first phase of national universal pharmacare in Canada, which would provide universal single-payer coverage for a number of contraception and diabetes medications.

Of course, we are making historic investments in affordable dental care, which is essential not only for oral health but also for overall health. In December, the new Canadian dental care plan began enrolment, and it is expected to support, by next year, nine million uninsured Canadians with a family income of less than \$90,000. Eligible seniors aged 65 and older are already able to apply, and in June, applications will open to children under 18 and to persons with a valid disability tax credit.

• (1630)

Kids under 12 are already covered by the interim Canada dental benefit, which launched in December 2022 and has supported nearly half a million children. More than \$400 million has been repaid to parents; families were able to use this money for things that were important to them, knowing that their children had received the care they needed.

Moreover, thanks to the federal government's efforts to work with provinces and territories to build more housing faster across Canada, together, we are on track to build nearly four million homes by the end of 2031. To help get this done, we are cutting federal taxes to new federal apartment developments, cutting red

tape, reforming zoning in cities and towns and providing direct low-cost financing to builders.

We are also making it easier for Canadians to buy a home and supporting Canadians who rent or own their homes. For example, to help renters facing skyrocketing rents across the country, the 2024 budget proposes a new Canadian renters' bill of rights, a new \$15-million tenant protection fund and a new \$1.5-billion Canada rental protection fund that would help affordable housing providers keep rents at a stable level for the long term.

For Canadians saving for their first home, especially millennials and gen Z, our tax-free first home savings account continues to make a real difference. Our new Canadian mortgage charter will help Canadians receive better support from their banks when facing financial difficulties, so they can make payments on time and stay in their hard-earned homes. We will keep working to accelerate housing construction and lower prices for Canadian buyers and renters, and we will continue calling on provinces, territories and municipalities to do everything they can to build more homes faster. That is what Canadians need from us and, frankly, what they deserve.

We have been relentless in our efforts to work with provinces and territories to build a better, fairer Canada. This work has certainly paid off, but we need to keep the momentum going. By collaborating with our partners across all levels of government, we can continue to drive our economy toward growth that lifts everyone up and keep the promise of Canada within everyone's reach.

Therefore, I encourage hon. members in the House to reject today's ill-conceived motion.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Trudel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the member says that the government is going to build four million homes by 2031.

It built 200,000 last year, which was practically a record, and only 39,000 of them were in Quebec. Building four million homes by 2031 would mean building close to 600,000 a year, which is about three times more than the most Canada has ever built.

Can my colleague help me make sense of that?

*Business of Supply**[English]*

Mr. Bryan May: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is not wrong. This is a huge challenge before us. Nobody is suggesting otherwise. Nobody is suggesting that this is going to be easy or that the federal government can do this on its own.

The question that should be asked of the member is, quite frankly, why we are not all focused on the same issue. Does he not see the demand? Does he not see the need for these homes? Does he not see the need for us to get absolutely down-in-the-dirt serious about solving the housing issue in Canada? We know this problem exists. We know the challenge exists.

This government is up for that challenge, and we will rise to it.

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am having a real challenge with the member talking about what a utopia the Liberals and NDP have brought to our country. It seems as though they are totally disconnected from what is happening on the streets. They do not see the millions more people going to food banks and the doubling of housing costs. He talks about program after program. It is not the Liberals' money; it is taxpayers' money.

It is very difficult. Quality of life is going down.

Will the member recognize that the Liberals have been relentless in undermining and ruining our country?

Mr. Bryan May: Mr. Speaker, obviously I reject the premise of the question.

I know that the member was not part of the previous government, but I do have to remind him that the previous government just simply did not answer the phone when the provinces called. We know this. We know that there was a complete detachment between the federal government and the provinces. The provinces were clamouring for support. When we were first elected, they were pounding on our doors for support. We know and remember this. We do not want to go back to a scenario where the federal government simply will not even pick up the phone when the provinces are saying, "Hey, we have a crisis."

Therefore yes, we have stepped up. Yes, we have invested incredible amounts of money to fix some of the problems that we inherited, and we still need to continue to work with the provinces and territories to ensure that we are doing this together. This is not about the federal government's coming in with an Ottawa-knows-best scenario. That is not what anybody wants to see. We know that we have to work together to solve the big issues, and I know that our government is prepared to do that.

Mr. Matthew Green (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke at length about the Liberal government's expansive budget. Obviously, what is before us today is this idea of exclusive jurisdiction, yet when we deal with things like health care, there is clearly a shared responsibility and an opportunity to have conditions when it comes to national service standards.

We know that the condition for the worker is also the patient condition, and I will reference the conditions of support workers, particularly in long-term care. They were the backbone of our senior care system, and despite everything they did for our elders

through COVID, many of them are unable to retire with dignity. For three years, the government has promised these workers help with building their retirement savings plan. It made promises in 2020 fall statement, in the 2021 budget and in the 2023 budget, which allocates supposedly \$50 million to the program, yet not a single dollar has flowed through to these workers.

Therefore my question to the hon. member is this: Will the government honour the commitment to personal support workers who belong to SEIU, CUPE, LiUNA 3000, and many others out there, to flow the funds through before the end of the next fiscal year?

• (1640)

Mr. Bryan May: Mr. Speaker, the member brings up a very good point.

We know how critical personal support workers are in our communities. We know how effective they are in helping people avoid having to go to emergency rooms, which, frankly, saves us money. We know that this is a critical need, and we also know that there are fewer and fewer people getting into this profession. We have to encourage the provinces to invest in this specific skill.

In my province of Ontario, I am deeply concerned about what the province has done to undermine the profession. There is a two-tiered system now under the Ford government with personal support workers, and it is not right. When a personal support worker can make more at Starbucks than they can in this role, it is not right. I would absolutely advocate for more support for PSWs.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what do we have to do to live to 120?

We mind our own business. Generally, that is a good technique for being well liked, for getting people's respect and for not getting into trouble. It is rather surprising to see that Canada has been around for 157 years while systematically not minding its business. That is a record.

Essentially, if we put it in good French for Quebecers to understand, today's motion calls on the government to mind its own damn business. We have to use the same crass, sloppy tone as the Prime Minister in drafting the motion.

The motion calls on the House to remind the Prime Minister that, despite his claims, it is not true that people do not care which level of government is responsible for what. It is his father's Constitution. It is a family quarrel. It is sad that it has come to this, because while we are constantly fighting over jurisdictions—and let us face it, Quebec is right, because the Constitution is very clear—there are people who are suffering, who do not have health care and who do not have housing. While these people are suffering, we are bickering over dental insurance, health transfers and the conditions that will or will not be attached. There are human consequences to this.

Business of Supply

With this motion, we are conveying a message from all governments in Quebec, going back as long as there has been a social policy in Quebec. I would actually like to quote some premiers who were by no means separatists. The member for Winnipeg North talked a lot about our separatist attitudes, but it is not merely an attitude. It is at the core of who we are.

I have a quote from a premier who said, “the provinces are then put in a position where no longer as legislators they decide as a matter of provincial policy that this is the type of social service their people require or desire, but rather their status is reduced to the mere right to decide whether or not they will participate in a programme that already has been decided at the federal level and which is now offered to them on a cost-sharing basis....in our opinion, shared cost programmes force a measure of uniformity that is beyond the dictates of desirability.”

That was said by Ernest Manning, who served as the premier of Alberta from 1943 to 1968.

In 1982, René Lévesque said that, in order to ensure the development of our society, the amending formula for the Canadian Constitution should recognize a general veto power or the right to opt out with full financial compensation in every other case.

This continued with the Johnson government and the Charest government. In fact, all governments have asked for balanced federal spending power and the right to opt out with full financial compensation. This includes governments under which several of the current members served, including the member for Bourassa, now a Liberal MP in the federal government. He sat behind Jean Charest and made this demand, as did the now-famous member for Belchasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis and the member for Mégantic—L'Érable, who served under Jean Charest. Several others, including the member for Louis-Saint-Laurent, who was part of Action démocratique du Québec and was also in the “yes” camp in 1995, have also made this demand. At one time or another, Quebec members were in favour of this.

I am delighted to see that the Conservatives are going to support our motion. They took a few nights to think it over, after voting against our amendment to the amendment to the budget, which called for exactly the same thing as this motion. Sometimes consistency must be learned.

Spending power has become a disease in Ottawa. We are talking about fiscal imbalance. At the time of Confederation, the federal government's responsibilities were very limited. There was no social policy and no welfare state. What evolved into today's welfare state, and what became social policy, health, education and assistance for the less fortunate, are things that the federal government handed over to the provinces because it was not interested. Religious orders took care of that. Since Protestants lived in Upper Canada, in Ontario, and Catholics lived in Quebec, the government decided to leave religious matters to the provinces.

Over time, these responsibilities have become critical components of the modern state in terms of quality of life, longevity, productivity, social and industrial policy, and more.

• (1645)

Unfortunately, the Constitution did not set out that the revenues that would become the most significant for a government would be shared equally between Quebec and Ottawa, which means that today, the provinces are drowning in responsibilities while the money is in Ottawa. This was never the intention. Normally, if the spirit of the Constitution had been respected, the government would have thought that if it was going to take tax points, tax bases, the ability to tax, then it should send it to the provinces so that they can be autonomous and the spirit of the Constitution would thus be respected.

However, because of a flaw in the Constitution, something called spending power has developed, the spending power under which Ottawa assumes the right to withhold money, attach conditions and literally put a gun to the provinces' heads, telling them that they will not get the money if they do not do what the federal government wants, even though Ottawa has absolutely no right to legislate in areas such as health, education, higher education, scholarships and so on. This is a serious problem.

This is a major problem first of all for transparency, because when Ottawa decides to cut transfers and funds, the public essentially experiences service cuts. From a democratic standpoint, people do not always know who to blame. In the 1990s, Quebec had to reverse course on ambulatory care and home care after Ottawa made budget cuts. People thought the Quebec government was responsible. Jean Chrétien admitted that balancing the budget was easy for him because he could simply make cuts and no one would be the wiser.

This is a democratic problem. This is a policy consistency problem, because each province has its own preferences. Guess what? That is a good thing. Each of them learns from the others. Ottawa boasts about borrowing Quebec's model and applying it to everyone else. So kind of Quebec, they say. When that happens, how does innovation move forward in other areas? How are the provinces supposed to innovate and get ideas from one another in upcoming areas of innovation? It is impossible.

We are also vulnerable to cuts. That is a message to the Conservatives because there is a big chance they will be in power soon. They are as excited as kids on Christmas. They know it is coming. They tell us that they respect provincial jurisdictions. The Harper government did this. They respected provincial jurisdictions.

Essentially what they are saying is that they are going to respect provincial jurisdictions so much that they will not pay the provinces another penny, that they will make cuts to the transfers, that they will not index them. Then, since the Liberals generated a massive debt by sticking their noses in the provinces' business, they are going to pay down the debt and the provinces will have to do what they can on health. The Conservatives need to understand that if they are in power some day, they will have to live with the problems caused by the Liberals and they will have to index the health transfers. This just shows that Quebec is vulnerable to a change in government in Ottawa.

Business of Supply

It is also a denial of democracy. This spending power has become a disease that is more serious than we suspect. I sat on the Standing Committee on Health for several months. We have reached a point where, when we say that Quebec's jurisdictions must be respected, we are told that it is no big deal, that spending power lets us do whatever we want. I heard my colleague from Thunder Bay—Rainy River and my NDP colleagues say so.

Physicians' federations are coming to Ottawa one after the other to ask for money, knowing that spending power will trample over the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces. For example, and this applies to a lot of other areas too, each federation asks for its own small program with its own small fund without realizing that, ultimately, the problem is systemic. The problem is that transfers need to be paid to Quebec with no strings attached in order for all needs to be met.

The spending power, the fiscal imbalance, makes Quebec vulnerable, makes our constituents vulnerable. More than that, it absolutely undermines Quebec's decision-making capacity. It forces Quebec to negotiate because the money is in Ottawa and then Ottawa will brag about it. Earlier my Liberal colleague spent 10 minutes telling us what she had negotiated with Quebec. It should not have been up for negotiation. The money should have gone directly to Quebec City.

Forcing a partner to negotiate is not a negotiation. It is what we call holding Quebec hostage. If the other provinces want that to happen, that is their business, but when the federal government creates a new program in the exclusive jurisdiction of Quebec, it is only natural that there be a bit of respect for Quebec, for the position of all its governments in history and that it be offered the right to opt out with full financial compensation.

• (1650)

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a fairly straightforward question that I put to other members of his caucus. There are many seniors who would benefit from the dental program and the proposed pharmacare program. We even have a disability program. Some provinces might have some supports and other provinces do not.

Does the member not recognize that many of his own constituents, as well as constituents throughout all 338 constituencies, would benefit from these programs? Does he not think Canadians should be receiving these types of benefits throughout the country?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, a large majority of Quebecers think it is important for governments to respect their areas of jurisdiction. That is the case in my riding. People come to see me. They are deeply insulted because not only is the federal government meddling in Quebec's affairs, but it is making a mess. People have to get out their credit card, go to the CRA portal and wait, without necessarily knowing how much they are going to get back. That was the case for a long time.

The Liberals fuel this perverse argument that if we want Quebec to set up programs that reflect Quebecers, it means we are work-

ing against our people, against the health of our people, against the well-being of our people. The fact that the member for Winnipeg North is even asking this question discredits his intellect.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since my colleague quoted me during his speech, I would like to ask him a few quick questions.

First, I would like to know why he committed the sin of omission when he assumed that we were inconsistent. Conservatives are very consistent. We did not support the Bloc Québécois's proposed subamendment on the budget for a very simple reason. In its subamendment, the Bloc Québécois wanted to eliminate the protection we wanted to give to farmers. The Bloc proposed respecting the jurisdictions of Quebec and the provinces, and granting Quebec and the provinces the right to opt out with full compensation. That is what the Bloc is doing today too, and we support that.

However, the Bloc Québécois also suggested that we withdraw our subamendment, which proposed abolishing the tax imposed on farmers, which then gets applied to food, by immediately passing Bill C-234 in its original form in order to build housing, not bureaucracy by requiring cities to increase residential construction by 15% every year as a condition for obtaining federal infrastructure funds.

I have a great deal of respect for my colleague. I sincerely wonder how he can live with himself, trying to mislead people like he just did a few moments ago.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Mégantic—L'Érable asks me how I am able to live with a so-called lie. Facts have never been the Conservatives' strong suit, so that is pretty funny.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, you can call the member to order. I know he has discipline issues. Sometimes those issues can be corrected, and there is no age limit.

The Conservatives say that they voted against Quebec's right to opt out with full compensation because they first needed to see that the government was infringing on Quebec's jurisdictions, meddling in municipal affairs, violating Quebec laws and imposing conditions directly on municipalities. He was the mayor of a city. I want to welcome him to the federal scene. If he likes trampling all over the jurisdictions of municipalities and the Quebec government, he will be fine here. He will like it here.

• (1655)

The Deputy Speaker: I want to make a quick reminder.

During debate, there is one person who asks a question and one person who answers the question.

The hon. member for Mirabel.

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight one thing. There may be heated debates, and that is perfectly fine, but a modicum of decorum must be maintained in the House.

Business of Supply

I want to point out that, throughout my speech, I was utterly incapable of hearing myself. The member for Mégantic—L'Érable showed a lack of respect, consideration and decorum. I think that should be noted.

The Deputy Speaker: I was hearing things from both sides during the intervention.

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable on a point of order.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that the member for Mirabel was offended by my comments. I was simply trying to get him back on track.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all, it was not about the substance of what was said, but it was really about the heckling. I am sitting next to the member for Mirabel, and I could not hear him respond.

My question is this. In the last budget, the government told Quebec that it has until January 1 to sign an agreement or it will negotiate with the cities on housing. That is illegal in Quebec. The Conservative housing plan does the same thing. It is forcing cities to increase construction by 15% or else it will cut its support in other areas. That is illegal in Quebec. We saw this during the Harper years. The federal government has continued to grow its tentacles and its size.

Basically, in Ottawa, between the Liberals and the Conservatives, is it not six of one and half a dozen of the other?

Mr. Jean-Denis Garon: Mr. Speaker, the problem goes deeper than that. When a party comes to power in Ottawa, it has few responsibilities while running a modern state but very deep pockets. Generally speaking, Conservative governments start abusing Ottawa's spending power when they take office. In this case, the Conservatives jumped the gun a bit by saying that they would simply be infringing on the jurisdictions of cities, such as Quebec City. A condition is a condition, whether it comes with a penalty or a reward.

Mr. Yves Perron (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to talk about interference. Actually, I am not pleased. I find it rather irritating to talk about interference because we always have to talk about it, given that many people in this Parliament do not understand what it means.

I was happy to hear my Bloc Québécois colleagues explain, each in their own way, what our motion means. My explanation of the motion will be very brief. First, we condemn the federal government's intrusions and we do not want them to happen any more. Second, it is false to claim that no one cares and, third, we give a very simple solution.

We want the right to opt out with full compensation. That does not take anything away from anyone. All we have to do is take our money and give it to those with expertise in the area where we want it invested. It is up to Quebec and the provinces to make the decisions. If the other provinces are okay with know-it-all Canada telling them what to do, then good for them, but Quebec is not okay with that. It is simple. The government just has to give us the right to opt out unconditionally with full compensation. I repeat that the right to opt out must be without conditions.

I hope that someone will finally realize it because Quebec does it better. It is a shame for the rest of Canada, but Quebec is better. All the major social and economic advances that Quebec has made, it did so by opting out of federal programs. We opted out of the Canada pension plan. That allowed us to create the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, one of the finest institutions in Quebec. It runs the Quebec pension plan, which is very effective and is working very well.

By opting out of the special employment insurance benefits, we managed to create our parental leave, a progressive system that does not exist anywhere else. It is exceptionally effective and has allowed an increased number of parents to participate in the workforce, especially women. By opting out of the federal student loans, we created our own system and we have a university system that is one of the most accessible in the world. It is not perfect, but it performs very well. We are able to take care of ourselves.

By opting out of the federal labour programs, we created our own employment policy, and it works well when the federal government does not get involved. It is simple as that. A few members of Parliament seem to see the motion as an attack. Quite the contrary, it is a defensive manoeuvre. Let us manage our own affairs with our own money. That is what we are saying. I hope the member for Winnipeg North does not repeat his bad metaphor about the ATM. It is our money that we put in that ATM. We put our own money into that machine, so I should not be embarrassed to make a withdrawal. The taxes were paid by Quebecers, and I want the money to be used efficiently. If the federal government adds another program on top of the one Quebec already has in place, it will not be efficient. I do not think that is so hard to understand.

Why duplicate bureaucracy? It is to score points with voters. That is the answer. The saddest part of all this is that it will allow the Prime Minister to make a grand announcement, with his hair blowing in the wind, and look good on television, but in four, five, six or seven years' time, or perhaps even in a year or two, the government will realize that millions of dollars were gobbled up by the middlemen. Not only do the Liberals want to interfere in our jurisdictions, but they are not even capable of doing the work themselves. They contract it out.

I would like to correct the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, who tabled an amendment and wondered why we rejected it. In his amendment, he said that this is a public dental plan. I am sorry, but it is not a public plan. Sun Life is not public. A private company is going to line its pockets through a highly imperfect system which a number of dentists in Quebec have already announced they have no intention of participating in. This is a far cry from Quebec's public dental plan which, we agree, is basic and very rudimentary, but was set up by Quebec. Why is Quebec's dental plan not perfect? It is because we only have half the money. Then, people wonder why we want to be an independent country. Well, it is so that we can manage our affairs in peace, so that we can be good neighbours instead of difficult bedfellows. That is all it is. It is as simple as that.

Business of Supply

• (1700)

The federal government interferes more and more every year. It is simple. Give us the right to opt out with full compensation.

I have already talked about pharmacare. Last fall, the federal government proposed setting up a sectoral round table on workforce training. However, it has no business doing so, since Quebec is already looking after that. Many of my colleagues have already mentioned funding for Quebec and municipal infrastructure and housing throughout today's debate. Quebec will look after that. When the federal government comes in with conditions, particularly on housing, we recall that it took three years to start building social housing because the federal government wanted to impose its views.

We always have to fight for everything. Now we are asking questions and they are saying that we are trying to pick a fight. Can we not simply examine the issue objectively and try to take effective action? I would like to ask the government members the following. Who is being deprived of something when the Quebec government, which already has programs, is given the envelopes intended for Quebec? This has already been done for child care, which the Liberal government likes to brag about from time to time. Is child care working well? Yes, it is. Is child care in the rest of Canada not doing as well because Quebec is managing its own affairs? No, it is not. Leave us alone. It is simple.

Why did the federal government give us child care money? The answer: We were on the eve of an election and it made for a great announcement. The government showed up in Quebec to make a great announcement on the eve of an election. When a possible payoff is on the table, it is all fine. It shows that this government does not act in the public interest or for the common good, but with election aims in mind.

In fact, when did it start announcing these seemingly generous programs? It was back when the government's poll numbers hit rock bottom and it faced the prospect of being wiped off the electoral map. It boggles the mind. The government enters panic mode and starts making announcements.

If it had transferred the funds to the provinces, it would not have been able to take credit for doing this or that, or say as an election promise that it would do something else. Unfortunately, and sadly, governments often make commitments and promises on the eve of an election. Much later, however, it becomes apparent that it was all talk.

I want to draw everyone's attention to the school food program, which I want to warn the government about. Organizations are already in place in Quebec. The Bloc Québécois applauds the release of those funds, a billion dollars over five years, but do members know what year the Liberals made that promise? It was in 2015. It is now 2024. The federal government announced this program with great fanfare and wants us to be happy and wants us to believe it, but could the government give us a little credit and respect people's intelligence?

What is happening is that the federal government has too much money and, because it has too much money, it does not need to be

cost-effective. That means that it is not being careful about its spending and that it is becoming embroiled in scandal after scandal.

It costs the federal government two and a half times more to process an EI claim than it costs the Quebec government to process a social assistance claim. Two and a half times more is the federal government's idea of being cost-effective. There is nothing to be happy about when these people start sticking their feelers into our health care system. Passports fall under federal jurisdiction. Why do the Liberals not start by being good at what they are responsible for? It costs the federal government four times more to issue a passport than it costs the Quebec government to issue a driver's licence. That is the federal government's idea of cost-effectiveness. Why do they not start doing their job. Nothing has been done since 1997 to deal with the shoreline erosion caused by navigation on the St. Lawrence River. They do not care about that, but yet they want to manage our dental insurance program.

Enough is enough. That is it. It is that simple.

Even the Parliamentary Budget Officer is calling out the fiscal imbalance and this ridiculous spending, saying that in the very short term or the medium term, the provinces' finances are not sustainable. When he talks about the provinces, he is talking about Manitoba, Ontario, all the others, not just Quebec.

Quebec is so distinct, we always say "Quebec and the provinces".

• (1705)

If the federal government could show a bit of respect and take care of its own jurisdictions, everything would go more smoothly.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whether it is the disability program, the dental program, the pharmacare program or the housing needs of Canada, I believe many of the measures we see before us today are there because Canadians have an expectation of the government and the government is providing these services. I like to think they are services that should be available across the country. I will use the specific example of diabetes and the medicines that are required. Many of the members' constituents across the country will benefit from that, as will many of the constituents I represent. Is that not a good thing? Does the member not support that?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, we are fine with applying this everywhere. That is not the problem. The problem is that Quebec is unique and has its own organizations. It is a distinct nation. Let us manage our own affairs. That is all we are asking.

Points of Order

The feds are not good at doing the things they are supposed to be doing. I will give a quick example, the AgriRecovery program. The Union des producteurs agricoles spoke to the media just today because 11% of businesses believe they will be forced to close in the coming year. More than 50% are unable to pay their debts right now or are scared. The situation is bad. AgriRecovery is the last-resort program that is used when all the other programs fail. It is meant to be an emergency program. Quebec asked for it in November. Today is May 23, and I have yet to get a date from the government.

Then these people come along and say that they will manage our affairs because they are better at it than us.

● (1710)

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not have much time, but I will use all the time I have to speak to this motion. As I mentioned earlier, we will be supporting this motion.

However, I would like to talk about the folks behind this motion, the Bloc Québécois. The Bloc Québécois claims to be a pro-independence party, but as we see today, and as we are seeing more and more, it is more of a pro-dependence party. The Bloc Québécois depends on the Liberal government for its very survival. Bloc members like the Liberals because they are just like them. They are like brothers.

I concede that they are not twins and there are some differences between the two parties. The first, the Liberal Party of Canada, claims to be a federalist party, but it believes that the federation is an albatross and does not respect the autonomy of the provinces. The second, the Bloc Québécois, claims to be a pro-independence party, but it owes its survival to the Prime Minister, whom it supports in all his spending and taxes. The Bloc Québécois likes having a big, interventionist government in Ottawa. The Bloc Québécois votes against budgets and economic updates in principle, but it is quick to vote for this government's budgetary appropriations and the federal government's excessive spending.

If we think about it, when a party always votes with the government on centralizing federal and Liberal government spending, it means that it also wants big government, a morbidly obese government.

That is what the Bloc Québécois supports here, in Ottawa. As proof, I would mention the fact that, since he arrived in Parliament in 2019, the Bloc Québécois leader has voted in favour of 100% of the Liberal Prime Minister's budget allocations. That is not insignificant. He voted 205 times to authorize \$500 billion in additional federal spending. In fact, \$500 billion is almost equal to Quebec's entire GDP, as the leader of the Conservative Party mentioned this morning. That is half a trillion dollars. That is a whole lot of money.

Here are some examples. The Bloc Québécois voted in favour of \$20 million of the \$60 million spent on the ArriveCAN app. It voted to increase the number of federal public servants by 110,000. It voted to help private companies, consultants, get increasingly large federal government contracts. Contracts went up from \$10 billion to \$20 billion.

If we take the time to look closely, it is clear that the Liberal and Bloc Québécois ideologies are similar. What did this \$500 billion of inflationary spending, which was supported by the Bloc Québécois, do? It increased inflation. It doubled the cost of housing. As a result, the dream of home ownership has drifted out of reach for young families, because the down payment for a house has become so high that it is no longer affordable, not to mention the interest rates for repaying the mortgage.

It is becoming unaffordable for young families, all across the country. This is what happens when a party decides to always support the government. When it comes to real change, there is only one option for Quebecers: the Conservatives' common-sense plan to axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget and stop the crime.

As the leader of the Conservative Party and, I hope and believe, the future prime minister of Canada said today, "with a small federal government, we will let Quebecers make their own decisions. They could decide to keep more money in their pockets or to give more money to their government in Quebec City."

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion.

If a member participating in person wishes that the motion be carried or carried on division, or if a member of a recognized party participating in person wishes to request a recorded division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

● (1715)

Mr. Yves Perron: Mr. Speaker, I request a recorded vote.

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 45, the division stands deferred until Monday, May 27, at the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER**RESPECT FOR THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHAIR**

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to contribute to the point of order raised by the NDP House leader on April 30 and May 1, to which the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader made a significant addition on May 8.

At its heart, the point of order is, I believe, an effort to censor and silence the fallout from the controversial events that happened during question period on April 30, an event none of us will forget any time soon. The hon. member for Lethbridge was called to order about comments concerning the Chair. She withdrew those comments, yet was named by the Chair and kicked out for the day.

Points of Order

The member's withdrawal of her comments, which was recorded in the blues, never made it into the day's Debates. That is an important distinction, because the blues are the temporary recording and transcript of what happened in the House, but what actually gets published and permanently put up on the parliamentary website, and indeed printed, are the Debates. The withdrawal was in the blues but somehow never made it into the permanent record. The Chair is currently seized with a question of privilege concerning that alarming editing of our records to align with the Speaker's conduct.

Then, the Prime Minister referred to the Leader of the Opposition as having "spineless leadership". Though the Speaker may have chided the Prime Minister, the Prime Minister was neither sanctioned nor disciplined. Immediately after, however, the Leader of the Opposition's next question also offered strong language, yet the Speaker applied a different standard to the Conservative Party's leader than he did to the Liberal Party's leader.

As a result, the Leader of the Opposition was also named and banished from the House for the day. Conservatives left the House for the balance of question period, as you might understand, after our leader had been, incredibly, ordered to stop questioning the Prime Minister about British Columbia's disastrous drug decriminalization experience and to leave the chamber. Nonetheless, I am not here to litigate that matter.

The main substance of the point of order now before the Chair lies in tweets many members of the Conservative caucus published in the minutes immediately following the shocking decision to name the Leader of the Opposition and expel him from the House in the middle of question period.

The NDP-Liberal coalition spokespersons on this matter have each suggested that various Conservative MPs must "withdraw their tweets", which I assume means deleting the tweets, and apologize before returning to the House. In other words, they would prefer Conservatives just stay silent and not draw any public attention to how the House is operating during these days of an NDP-Liberal coalition government in Canada.

As I mentioned, those members raised this as a point of order. As you would know, points of order concern House proceedings and irregularity in procedures. It is also well established that statements made outside the House do not fall within the Speaker's purview to maintain order here, under points of order, within the chamber in ensuring that House proceedings run smoothly. I would refer the Chair to page 620 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, which says quite clearly, "The Speaker has no authority to rule on statements made outside the House by one Member against another."

In fact, this point was made by the Assistant Deputy Speaker on April 30, when the NDP House leader first raised the point of order, saying, at page 22816 of the Debates, "The other [aspect] that was brought to the attention of the Speaker was the fact that statements are being made outside of the House by a member. The Speaker has no authority to rule on that, as the hon. member has indicated."

Several of your predecessors have been invited to weigh in on statements made by members outside the walls of the chamber. In

one of the earliest rulings concerning tweets, Speaker Milliken held, at page 1284 of the Debates for April 1, 2010:

It is clearly impossible for the Chair to police the use of personal digital devices by members, for example, by trying to distinguish whether certain texting has originated from the Chamber or not. Nor would the Chair want to change its longstanding practice of refraining from comment on statements made outside the House.

In any event, as you will recall, Conservative MPs exited the chamber after the Leader of the Opposition was named, so they had tweeted from outside the House. Moreover, since the leader and the hon. member for Lethbridge had been named, their subsequent tweets, which were among those of concern in the point of order, simply could not have been published from inside the chamber.

Turning back to the precedents on point, one of your more recent predecessors, Speaker Regan, said on November 20, 2017, at page 15303 of the Debates, "the Chair's role is very limited to the review of the statements made in a proceeding of Parliament. In other words, the Chair cannot comment on what transpires outside of the deliberations of the House or its committees." Speaker Regan expanded upon this point in his October 30, 2018, ruling, at page 23033 of the Debates, stating, "As a result...the Speaker cannot be officially apprised of anything said to have transpired outside the walls of this place".

● (1720)

Another of your predecessors explained the underlying principle for this approach on February 9, 2012, at page 5096 of the Debates:

We know that outside the chamber, when a member or anyone may say something that would offend or call into question someone's character, there are remedies that are not available inside the chamber. That is usually why the authority of the Speaker does not extend outside the chamber for things that are said.

In sum, Mr. Speaker, I would urge you to heed the well-trodden ground of your predecessors and find that the member's comments made outside the House, including tweets, simply do not come within your jurisdiction to maintain order within the chamber. A point of order raised on this very question simply is not under the Speaker's purview.

Before concluding, there is one final point I would like to add, because I know the Chair is seized with a couple of different aspects of the events of April 30. In a May 1 Canadian Press article on the opposition leader's naming, one might read this passage:

A spokesman for [the Speaker] said Wednesday that the Speaker didn't just single out [the leader of the opposition], noting he also asked [the Prime Minister] to reframe one of his questions after he called [the member for Carleton] a "spineless leader".

"The prime minister reframed his answer," Mathieu Gravel said.

Mathieu Gravel is the spokesman for the Speaker. That is a direct quote: “The Prime Minister reframed his answer”. The quote goes on:

“The Speaker offered [the Leader of the Opposition] four opportunities to withdraw his comment and reframe his question. [The Conservative Leader] did not avail himself of those opportunities.”

That is the Speaker's spokesman speaking on behalf of the Speaker publicly to the media on events that happened in the chamber.

Let me read Hansard from that day. There is the first interaction with the Speaker, saying, “I am going to ask two things. The first is that the hon. Leader of the Opposition withdraw that term, which is not considered parliamentary.” The opposition leader then said, “Mr. Speaker, I replace ‘wacko’ with ‘extremist’.”

The Speaker got up again and said, “I am going to ask the Leader of the Opposition once again to simply withdraw that comment, please.” The Leader of the Opposition said, “Mr. Speaker, I will replace it with ‘radical’.”

The Speaker then goes on to say, “I am going to ask the hon. Leader of the Opposition one last time to simply withdraw that comment, please.” Here is the key phrase that comes next; the Leader of the Opposition said, “Mr. Speaker, I simply withdraw it and replace it with the aforementioned adjective.”

Here we have the spokesman for the Speaker saying that the Prime Minister reframed his answer, as an excuse for why the Prime Minister did not face any sanction. The spokesman for the Speaker said that the Speaker offered four opportunities to withdraw his comments and reframe his question, and that the Leader of the Opposition did not avail himself of those opportunities.

As I just said, the Leader of the Opposition absolutely did withdraw it and reframe it, exactly as the Speaker's spokesman said publicly in the media but in a way to suggest that it did not happen. It actually happened, if we look at the video of that day's events and Hansard, which is printed.

If it is fair game for the Speaker, through his spokesman, to comment outside the chamber on House proceedings with what, I would submit, is an incorrect and inaccurate spin, then it can only be equally fair for other members to make their own comments outside the chamber about what happened during this unprecedented sequence of events. I trust that any ruling on this current point of order from the NDP-Liberal coalition would not result in double standards being created or extended.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for the intervention. Of course the Chair will take it under advisement and come back to the House as soon as possible.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader is rising on a point of order.

• (1725)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I suspect if you were to canvass the House, you would find unanimous consent to see the clock at 5:30 p.m. to start Private Members' Business.

Private Members' Business

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5.30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

CRIMINAL CODE

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill S-224, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in persons), as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

[*English*]

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: There are two motions in amendment standing on the Notice Paper for the report stage of Bill S-224. Motions Nos. 1 and 2 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[*Translation*]

I will now put Motions Nos. 1 and 2 to the House.

[*English*]

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Colin Carrie (Oshawa, CPC) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill S-224 be amended by restoring the long title as follows:

“An Act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in persons)”

Motion No. 2

That Bill S-224 be amended by restoring Clause 1 as follows:

“Criminal Code

1 (1) Subsection 279.04(1) of the Criminal Code is replaced by the following:

Exploitation

279.04 (1) For the purposes of sections 279.01 to 279.03, a person exploits another person if they engage in conduct that

(a) causes the other person to provide or offer to provide labour or a service; and

(b) involves, in relation to any person, the use or threatened use of force or another form of coercion, the use of deception or fraud, the abuse of a position of trust, power or authority, or any other similar act.

(2) Subsection 279.04(2) of the Act is repealed.”

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Oshawa to speak to Bill S-224, a non-partisan bill which aims to further solidify the concept of exploitation, for the purpose of establishing whether a person has committed the offence of trafficking in persons and to remove the unfair burden placed on exploited individuals to prove that there was an element of fear in their abuse.

Private Members' Business

Before arriving at the stage of consideration at committee, Bill S-224 was introduced in the Senate and eventually passed unanimously in the Senate on October 6, 2022. I then had the immense distinction as a member of Parliament to sponsor and introduce this important bill for the first time here in the House of Commons two weeks later.

I would like to take a moment to thank Senator Ataullahjan for her collaborative effort and wonderful success in getting the bill through the Senate, a success I hope to share here in the House of Commons. I would also like to thank the member for Peace River—Westlock for his unwavering support throughout this process and, as well, for his unending commitment to end human trafficking.

Furthermore, I want to thank the amazing community of supporters, victims, moms and dads, survivors and workers. These individuals and many more like them have shown a dedication and servitude in making a difference in the lives of the vulnerable victims in everyone's communities. These people are real heroes and they are saving lives with the work that they are undertaking and that they are accomplishing.

When a member of Parliament has the opportunity to bring both Houses together for a common cause, it is truly an honour, especially with respect to a bill that represents a small change that would make a big difference in the lives of so many vulnerable people, people denied justice and people denied their human dignity.

Unfortunately, when Bill S-224 was considered in the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, the bill experienced a fatal outcome. The vital contents within it were completely gutted, the committee leaving the bill to just one page. By leaving the bill empty, and instead of passing any improved amendments, there has been a failure to solidify the concept of exploitation for the purposes of establishing whether a person has committed the offence of trafficking in persons, as well as a failure to remove the unfair burden placed on exploited individuals to prove that there was an element of fear in their abuse.

I would like to take a couple of minutes now to discuss an in-depth review of the importance behind the original contents of Bill S-224. This modern-day slavery initiative was first brought to my attention by Darla, a survivor friend and one of my constituents, and I would like to thank her for sharing her story with me. As a father, I was motivated by her story to look for real solutions to the problem.

At its heart, Bill S-224 aims to align the Canadian Criminal Code's definition of trafficking in persons with that of the 2000 Palermo protocol. Importantly, this would remove the unfair burden placed on exploited individuals who, under the current Canadian law, must prove that there was an element of fear in their abuse in order to obtain a conviction in court. When a crime is committed, there is no debate as to whether the acts have occurred, yet under Canadian law, the victim of trafficking is required to prove fear in order for a conviction to occur. The absurdity of the situation is unmatched. An offender could be released even if there was proof of the crime but the victim was unable to prove fear.

Why do we treat this particular crime so differently when it comes to exploitation in human trafficking? That is backwards. Instead, we need to make the focus on the perpetrator's actions, on the person who actually committed the crime, and not force a victim to prove an emotion, in this case fear. Something needs to change as this is not justice, and, in turn, this is not how a Canadian justice system should function.

Human trafficking is a plague, mostly on vulnerable young people and their families across Canada, in my area and in others'. I was hopeful, since I first sponsored and introduced Bill S-224 in the House, that my colleagues, regardless of their political stripe, would help me secure this long-overdue change to Canada's Criminal Code. Human trafficking does not discriminate, and my goal is to ensure that our country and local communities are safer for our most vulnerable young people.

Vulnerable young people often think of their abuser as their friend, thinking that their abuser cares for them and loves them. Those of us not involved in human trafficking can see that this is not the case. We see the coercion, manipulation and lies. We owe the victims justice.

Often the Crown's case depends on the victim's testimony, the only evidence against the trafficker. Without the victim's testimony, there is no case. In Canada, sometimes it takes years to come to court. There the victims can be victimized again and again. We have heard from experts that victims often deceive themselves and portray themselves within their own perception as not being victims.

• (1730)

We need to take serious and effective action to ensure that victims come forward and need to guarantee that they will not be repeatedly victimized. I once again raise within this House the dispute as to whether the crime of human trafficking has occurred should only be defined by the perpetrator's actions, rather than the victim's experience. Victims should not be revictimized by a system. We owe it to victims to make this small change that would make such a huge difference.

By amending the Criminal Code to reflect the international definition of trafficking in persons, as outlined in the Palermo protocol, we would enable the Crown to efficiently convict human traffickers. The Palermo protocol was adopted in November 2000 at the 55th session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. It has 117 signatories, including Canada. Human trafficking is defined as the act of recruiting, transporting, harbouring and receiving a person by means of coercion, abuse of power or deception for the purpose of exploitation.

More than 24 years have passed, yet this small but important change is still not reflected in our Criminal Code. Let us not continue to make this another example of Canada's promises that never see concrete action. This is about protecting vulnerable Canadians from predators who exploit their victims for personal gain, and sadly, that gain is becoming greater and much more lucrative. Human trafficking generates more than \$32 billion annually and abuses over 40 million victims each year.

Private Members' Business

Unfortunately, it is seen as a low-risk criminal activity here in Canada with a very high reward. According to Statistics Canada, fewer than 8% of perpetrators charged with human trafficking have been prosecuted. Let us think about that and consider this: Very few perpetrators are even charged. One witness felt we no longer needed the bill, due to the Ontario provincial rulings. However, we see that even with these provincial rulings, conviction rates remain shamefully low, which is why we need to restore this bill, Bill S-224, and to pass it here in the House. We can do better, and we must do better.

I stand here today for Darla from Oshawa and for countless other human trafficking survivors. I invite all members here to stand with me, and I am hoping that every member in the House still continues to support this initiative. I stand here for those who are being exploited tonight, right now, in plain sight, some right outside my office doors in downtown Oshawa. This does not end at my doorstep. Each member in the House of Commons can be sure this is happening right outside each of their doorsteps as well. My colleague from Peace River—Westlock has a statistic and saying that puts things into perspective: This crime of human trafficking is happening today, within 10 blocks or 10 minutes from one's home.

Human trafficking is on the rise, and it relies on abuse, coercion and manipulation. As I have said, victims are often convinced that their traffickers are their friends or their boyfriends. Traffickers have made promises of clothes, money, work, drugs, education and even protection. Many victims truly and naively believe that their traffickers have their best interests at heart. Traffickers prey upon the most vulnerable for a reason, as they also resort to violence and threats to make them do what they are told. Traffickers seek out young people dealing with substance abuse, traumas, addictions, abuse or homelessness. Women and girls, indigenous children, new immigrants, persons living with disability, LGBTQ2+ and migrant workers are among groups most at risk.

How can we continue to put so much responsibility upon these victims who have endured such unimaginable atrocities? If we do not amend the Criminal Code, these cases depend upon the victims' ability to perform on the witness stand. Remember, these are the same victims we just described as being vulnerable to gaslighting and manipulation. Some of these victims do not have the strength to fight our current system. They do not have the strength to stand up against slick lawyers and a system stacked against them. This is not justice, and it usually results in charges being dropped.

We need to give victims every possible tool that is available to allow the return of both their dignity and their humanity. The goal of Bill S-224 has been to implement a simple amendment to the Criminal Code, a very small modification that would make a huge difference in the ability of the Crown to prosecute human traffickers. There is no more settling for an 8% prosecution rate. To Darla, to the moms, to the dads, to the victims and to the wonderful Canadians who have dedicated their lives to ending human trafficking, this small change can happen, and the opportunity for us to come together to end this horrendous crime must not be lost.

• (1735)

Mr. James Maloney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to stand in the House on behalf of the resi-

dents of Etobicoke Lakeshore. This evening, I am pleased to speak to Bill S-224, an act to amend the Criminal Code with regard to human trafficking.

I want to say at the outset that while we are unable to support the bill, I understand the objective the sponsor was trying to achieve, and it is a laudable one. The intention of the sponsor is to protect victims and to hold human traffickers accountable. However, after the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights' review of the proposed legislation, including hearing from a variety of witnesses, it was apparent that the bill raised significant legal concerns and would likely end up making it harder to prosecute human traffickers rather than easier, as was intended. Although the committee and the government cannot support the bill, I am very grateful for the opportunity this bill, Bill S-224, has provided to review the Criminal Code's human trafficking provisions. It is critical we do so to continue to ensure a robust response.

Human trafficking is one of the most heinous crimes imaginable. It is often described as a modern-day form of slavery. It involves the recruitment, transportation, harbouring and/or control over the movement of persons for the purpose of exploitation, typically for sexual exploitation or forced labour. Human trafficking devastates its victims and survivors, their families, communities and society as a whole.

In Canada, available data primarily concerns human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Traffickers seek to profit from the sexual exploitation of others, treating victims as commodities for the traffickers financial gain. Between 2010 and 2021, the large majority of individuals accused of trafficking were men and were most commonly between the ages of 18 and 24. While we know that anyone can be targeted by a trafficker and can become a victim of human trafficking, between 2010 and 2021, 96% of police-reported victims were women and girls. Almost one in four, or 24%, of the reported victims were younger than 18 years old; half, 45%, were between 18 and 24 years old; and one in five, 20%, were between 25 and 34 years old. Moreover, women and girls are more at risk of being targeted by a trafficker when they are impacted by factors like poverty, isolation, precarious housing, substance use, history of violence, childhood maltreatment and mental health issues. In short, traffickers look for young women and girls in precarious situations and target these individuals for their own financial gain.

Private Members' Business

We also know that indigenous women and girls are disproportionately represented among those trafficked, or are at risk of being trafficked for sexual exploitation. The final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls speaks to many of the intersecting factors that increase the likelihood of being targeted by a trafficker, including systemic racism, violence against indigenous women and girls, intergenerational trauma from colonization, lack of access to social and economic resources, and colonial assimilation policies. The majority of victims are trafficked by someone they know. For example, nearly one-third of victims have been trafficked by a current or former intimate partner. In fact, some traffickers target and romantically pursue a potential victim with the specific intent of exploiting them.

Traffickers use manipulation and deception to exploit the vulnerabilities of those they target. This can include providing at-risk women and girls with affection, care and security. Why do they do this? They are positioning themselves as someone their victim can trust so that they can more easily control that victim. Once control is established, traffickers use a variety of tactics to maintain control. They may sexually and physically assault the victim, starve or confine the victim, engage in psychological abuse or threaten violence. They turn the victim's life into a living nightmare. Traffickers will go to great lengths to keep victims isolated and unable to seek help. They often separate victims from those who could help them, hiding them from the public and ensuring they do not have access to support. They may force victims to commit crimes while being trafficked and convince them that they will be arrested if they try to seek help.

We also know that victims may be unwilling or unable to seek help for a number of reasons, such as distrust of authorities, which is often created or fostered by the traffickers themselves, or because victims are fearful or ashamed, are not aware of their rights in Canada, are experiencing language barriers or are wanting to protect their trafficker. After being trafficked, victims may experience post-traumatic stress and memory loss as a result of the physical, sexual, financial, emotional and psychological abuse they were subject to while being trafficked.

• (1740)

Many victims live with both the physical and the psychological scars of the trauma they have endured. It is paramount that victims be supported and that the traffickers be brought to justice. I am assured by the fact that the Criminal Code contains a robust legislative framework governing human trafficking, which includes specific human trafficking offences, including trafficking in adults, child trafficking, materially benefiting from human trafficking and withholding or destroying identity documents to facilitate this crime, with maximum penalties up to life imprisonment.

As human trafficking cases are complex, additional offences may be used, depending on the facts, such as uttering threats, forcible confinement, assault and sexual assault. Bill S-224 sought to strengthen the framework, and I agree with the bill's sponsor that we must continue to reflect on how we can ensure the most robust legislative framework possible, and as I have said, I am grateful that we have had the opportunity to do just that.

We know that the Criminal Code's human trafficking provisions, which were first enacted in 2005, have been interpreted broadly and that they apply in a broad range of cases, including those that involve only psychological forms of coercion. I will quote from one committee witness, Dawne Way, who represented the victims of human trafficking and who opposes the bill. She said, for example, "I have two main reasons for taking this position. The first is that it is unnecessary, and the second is that the amendment would result in unintended delays and constitutional challenges that would be to the detriment of complainants."

I want to conclude by expressing my thanks to Senator Ataulhjan and to the member for Oshawa for providing us with the opportunity to review the Criminal Code's legislative framework that criminalizes human trafficking. While I firmly believe we should be reviewing these important provisions to ensure they are achieving their important objectives, I am reassured by the court's broad interpretation, which is consistent with its objectives of protecting victims from the full range of exploiting conduct and of holding offenders to account.

Given the evidence that Bill S-224 is likely to make it harder to prosecute human trafficking rather than easier, we have to oppose the bill.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill S-224, which "amends the Criminal Code to specify what constitutes exploitation for the purpose of establishing whether a person has committed the offence of trafficking in persons".

The Bloc Québécois supports the principle of this bill, because it is imperative that we discuss all the tools likely to help the authorities combat this scourge, which is getting worse as more people move around the globe and the number of refugees increases. This topic is near and dear to my heart, because I would actually like to point out that, although I was unable to attend the annual general meeting yesterday, I had expressed my interest in renewing my mandate as co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group to End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking with my three other colleagues. There are four co-chairs, and we have been working on this issue for several years now.

I will talk about this bill by explaining it in greater detail, then I will talk a bit about the Palermo protocol, and then I will close by denouncing human smugglers.

Private Members' Business

First, this bill responds to the demands of several human trafficking survivors' groups and would make the definitions of exploitation and human trafficking more consistent with those set out in the Palermo protocol, which Canada signed in 2000. Bill S-224 is very simple but very important. It removes a phrase from the Criminal Code stating that a charge under these provisions must be based on the fact that the victim believes "that their safety or the safety of a person known to them would be threatened" if they fail to comply. According to the International Justice and Human Rights Clinic at the University of British Columbia's Faculty of Law, asking victims to demonstrate that they have reasonable grounds to fear for their safety may be an obstacle to obtaining convictions for human trafficking. Elements of the offence of human trafficking are more difficult to prove than those of other similar offences. For example, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which prohibits human trafficking, does not require the person involved to prove that they fear for their safety. This standard is no longer appropriate.

Second, it is important to note that this issue transcends borders because of the Palermo protocol, which dates back to 2000. On May 13, 2002, Canada ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. Article 3 of the convention clearly defines trafficking in persons. That is how trafficking in persons was added to the Criminal Code in 2005. However, the Canadian definition does not match the one in the Palermo protocol, since the issue of consent or the victim's sense of security is taken into account in it. In Canada, the victim must prove that he or she was in danger or that he or she refused to be exploited.

In a case of trafficking in persons, regardless of whether the victim was initially willing or felt safe, the victim should not have to justify the circumstances under which they were lured in order to prove that trafficking in persons occurred. The U.S. State Department studied the legislation of its two neighbours, Canada and Mexico. Obviously, there is no real comparison. However, the report does make suggestions for Canada. It is important to remember that even if consent was given, such as consent to come to Canada, it does not mean that the person consented to the forced labour or sexual exploitation to which they were subsequently exposed, especially if the victim is dependent on someone because of isolation, lack of resources and language barriers.

In 2005, Bill C-49 added three human trafficking offences to the Criminal Code, as well as a definition. Trafficking in persons is now defined as receiving a financial or other material benefit for the purpose of committing or facilitating trafficking in persons, as set out in section 279.02; withholding or destroying a person's identity documents—which happens sometimes or often, even—such as a passport, whether authentic or forged, for the purpose of committing or facilitating trafficking of that person, as set out in section 279.03; and exploitation for the purpose of human trafficking offences, as set out in section 279.04.

In 2008-09, the first case involving a human trafficking charge under this new legislation was completed in adult criminal court. In 2010, subsection 279.011(1) was added to the Criminal Code. It imposed mandatory minimum penalties for individuals accused of the "trafficking of a person under the age of eighteen years". That was

Bill C-268. In 2012, the Criminal Code was amended to allow for the prosecution of Canadians and permanent residents for human trafficking offences committed internationally and to provide judges with an interpretive tool to assist in determining whether exploitation occurred. That is in subsection 279.04(1), and it was Bill C-310.

- (1745)

In 2015, mandatory minimum sentences were imposed for the main trafficking in persons offence under section 279.1 of the Criminal Code, for receiving a material benefit from child trafficking under subsection 279.02 of the Criminal Code, and for withholding or destroying documents to facilitate child trafficking under subsection 279.03(2), stemming from former Bill C-454 introduced by the Bloc Québécois. We have been thinking about this issue for a few years now.

Let us talk about the link between human smugglers and human trafficking. In the context of trafficking in persons, it is important to recognize the related issue of migrant smuggling, which is often mistaken for human trafficking. Migrant smuggling, or what some might call migration assistance, consists of helping an individual cross a border illegally. The individual consents to being transported and makes a payment to the smuggler in exchange for the desired service. On their arrival, the individual can simply be dropped off and cease all contact with the smuggler.

In contrast, human trafficking involves deception, coercion or debt bondage with the aim of exploiting people who might be transported from one place to another. Victims do not necessarily cross borders.

Human trafficking and human smuggling often intersect because smuggled migrants often find themselves in situations of exploitation similar to those experienced by victims of trafficking. This may be the case for people who owe their smuggler money for transportation costs and have to work to pay it back. This is abusive, because the sums involved can be exorbitant when these people arrive. That can also be the case for migrant workers who are forced to work in exploitative conditions. In these cases, human trafficking charges could be laid, even if the smuggled migrants consented to the smuggling at the outset. Things can go sideways afterwards.

All of that contributes to the low rate of reporting. That is the problem. As one can imagine, when victims of trafficking realize what is happening, they hesitate to come forward. According to the sponsor of the bill in the Senate, Julie Miville-Dechéne, a 2018 report from Public Safety Canada explains that victims are often reluctant to report their situation, since they tend to believe that the success rate of prosecutions is very low. Prosecutors, for their part, find it difficult to reach the high threshold of evidence required for trafficking cases.

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The statistics are startling. In 2019, 89% of human trafficking charges resulted in a stay, withdrawal, dismissal or discharge. Less than one in ten charges resulted in a guilty verdict. That is why we are examining this issue today.

• (1750)

According to a study by the University of British Columbia's Alard School of Law, there are approximately 4.8 million victims of sex trafficking alone, and 99% of them are female. Statistics Canada has indicated that, according to police-reported data, 2,977 incidents of human trafficking occurred between 2010 and 2020. During that period, 86% of incidents were reported in census metropolitan areas, compared to 58% of incidents of violence or approximately six out of 10. Over half, or 57%, of incidents involved human trafficking alone, whereas 43% also involved other types of crime, mainly offences related to the sex trade. The vast majority, or 81%, of accused human traffickers were men or boys, who were most commonly between the ages of 18 and 24, at 41%, followed closely by men between the ages of 25 and 34, at 36%.

Human trafficking cases took almost twice as long to resolve as cases involving violent offences in adult criminal courts. That is another problem. The median time it took to resolve a case involving at least one violent offence charge in an adult criminal court was 176 days. In contrast, the median time to resolve a case involving a human trafficking charge was 373 days.

It is still hard to get accurate data about the true extent of trafficking. All the organizations agree that it is a widespread problem that generates proceeds rivaling those of drug and gun trafficking. In 2014, the International Labour Office estimated that illegal profits in the general category of forced labour amounted to \$150.2 billion U.S. per year, a figure that is still often cited today because it is so huge.

In closing, I too applaud the new provision proposed by Senator Ataullahjan, not least because it uses the terminology from the Palermo protocol, which means that it focuses on the actions of the trafficker, not the victims' fear. Victims' confidence and dignity must be restored, and they must be able to report what is happening to them. More of these cases need to be reported.

• (1755)

[*English*]

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Shefford for all the work she does to protect exploited women and persons in Canada. I really appreciate all of the hard work she does.

New Democrats are supportive of measures that help victims receive justice through the justice system. This is why we wanted this bill to go to committee for study. The study was very important, and I believe that all members are committed to better laws that can truly protect people from human trafficking. This is one of the fastest-growing crimes in Canada, and it disproportionately affects women and girls. We heard from other speakers today that, in 97% of detected crimes, the victims of human trafficking were women and girls. As the member for Shefford said, a quarter of them are under the age of 18. This is children being exploited. It is a serious problem, and it must end.

What we heard in committee and in the study is that the bill, as it stood, would not provide more resources for targeting trafficking units and for law enforcement, and it would not make the struggle against trafficking more effective. In addition, changing the legal definition could have unintended consequences, particularly for sex workers. We heard that in committee.

My colleague from Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke received a petition from more than 60 organizations asking us not to proceed with this bill without further consultation, and members of the House know that the bill reported back to the House reflected that. The Conservatives, though, are now ignoring important community input, which is usually a Liberal tactic, I will say, and are attempting to put back in the bill exactly what the justice committee took out of it. That approach is not helping victims. If the Conservatives want to protect trafficked victims, they need to start pushing for actions that would help address trafficking crime. This must be the goal, and it must be the goal for Canada. We must do this.

Casting a broad net, as the original bill did, risks the mistake of defining all sex work as trafficking and missing actual cases of trafficking. When we think about young girls, children, we need to make sure that we can get at every case of trafficking.

I will close by reiterating that additional enforcement resources are needed now, and additional services for survivors are needed now. These resource investments would have greater impact on reducing trafficking than any legislative change that would come from the bill.

Mr. Arnold Viersen (Peace River—Westlock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill S-224. This is an incredible bill that would do important work when it comes to fighting human trafficking.

I want to acknowledge the hard work of the sponsors of the bill: Senator Ataullahjan, who steered this bill through the Senate, and the MP for Oshawa, who has been championing this bill and this issue here in the House for many years.

This bill is critical to Canada's effort to target and apprehend pimps and traffickers, and I want to begin by reviewing the bizarre situation we found ourselves in today.

The bill before us was an empty bill. It did not even have a title. However, Bill S-224 was introduced in November of 2021 in the Senate. It passed second reading there in April 2022, and by October it had been passed by the Senate unanimously.

Here in the House, Bill S-224 passed second reading unanimously and was sent to committee, where a number of survivors and frontline organizations all called in their testimony for this bill to be passed.

Then last June, when I was at the final justice committee meeting on this bill, it became clear that the NDP and the Liberals suddenly did not want this bill to pass. I was shocked to see the Liberals and the NDP gut this bill during clause-by-clause consideration. I had never seen anything like this before. They had an option of recommending that the House not proceed, but instead they gutted the bill and removed even the title and sent it back here as a blank piece of paper.

This bill on fighting human trafficking had unanimous support every step of the way through the Senate and the House of Commons until seven Liberals and an NDP MP decided to destroy it, so here we are today debating important amendments to restore the clauses of the bill.

Survivors and frontline anti-trafficking organizations are calling for this bill to be passed because our human trafficking laws are not accomplishing what we want them to do. Our current human trafficking laws put a burden of proof on the mindset of the victim rather than on the actions of the traffickers. This is contrary to the international legal standard called for in the Palermo protocol, which Canada signed on to over 20 years ago. The Palermo protocol defines human trafficking based on the actions of the traffickers, such as the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, or abduction, fraud, deception, or abuse of power or position of vulnerability. In contrast, our laws are much more narrow.

At the committee, Dr. Janine Benedet, a law professor from UBC's Allard School of Law, told justice committee members that:

the definition of trafficking in the [Canadian] Criminal Code at present is unnecessarily convoluted and too restrictive. It is very hard for victims to come forward, and having an offence that is so difficult to prove makes matters worse. ... Removing the requirement to prove reasonable fear for safety, as this bill does, would be very helpful, because it is inappropriate to impose a reasonableness requirement on victims. We should be focusing on the actions of the trafficker.

Dr. Benedet also pointed out that the fear of safety is not the only way that traffickers influence and control their victims, and we do not require this type of subjective focus from victims for other laws, such as the law on sexual assault.

We have seen the impact of this restrictive definition on human trafficking in the Criminal Code. For the 10-year period between 2011 and 2021, only 12% of adult human trafficking cases resulted in a guilty decision, which is only one in eight cases. Human trafficking cases are half as likely to result in a guilty finding as cases involving sexual offences or violent crime. This is tragic, and it is largely because convictions so often require the testimony of victims.

This gap in our law has even been noted by our strongest ally. Every year for the past few years, the Government of the United States' "Trafficking in Persons Report" has urged Canada to amend

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the Criminal Code to include a definition of trafficking that has exploitation as an essential element of the crime, consistent with international law.

An important question we always need to ask about any legislation is this: Who stands to benefit if the bill is defeated? For example, we have seen over the past number of years how Liberals have worked to protect big pharmaceutical companies. In fact, over the past few years, Liberal cabinet ministers have aided big pharmaceutical companies by keeping drug prices high for Canadians. The Liberals have helped to bring more profits into the pockets of big pharma executives.

• (1800)

Who stands to benefit if Bill S-224 is gutted or defeated? Pimps and traffickers do. That is tragic. However, it is consistent with the government. It has blocked consecutive sentencing for traffickers after being adopted by Parliament; reduced human trafficking offences to a hybrid offence, meaning traffickers would sometimes get away with as little as a fine; and extending house arrest for human trafficking offences. Who benefits from all these changes? Pimps and traffickers do.

Further, the government has been negligent in appointing judges. This year, a sex trafficker had two separate human trafficking cases thrown out because of delays. Each time these cases collapse, it denies justice to victims and their families, and it allows dangerous individuals to return to the street.

Let me be clear: By killing this bill, the Liberals and the NDP are helping traffickers stay out of jail. They are making it easier for traffickers to continue their business as usual. The Liberals and the NDP are helping to put more money in the pockets of violent pimps.

I want to conclude by highlighting the important testimony from the survivors and advocates who showed up at the justice committee.

Wendy Gee, the executive director of A New Day Youth and Adult Services, and a mother of a daughter who was trafficked, told the committee this: Out of all the young women the organization has supported, only two have come forward and provided a statement to law enforcement about the trafficking situation. Wendy urged the committee to adopt Bill S-224, stating the following:

Eliminating the burden of proving they were fearful while they were exploited tells a victim that we believe them, that what they have endured was not a measure of their worth or value, was not indicative of the type of treatment they deserved and was not the result of poor decision-making, and that their victimization will not be [allowed to continue] by our justice system.

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Cassandra Diamond, a survivor of trafficking, and the founder and executive director of an organization called BridgeNorth, also spoke to the committee. She said:

Bill S-224 would support victims by reducing the burden they experience when testifying and trying to prove they feared their trafficker. The proposed amendment would eliminate the difficult requirement that the Criminal Code currently places on prosecutors to show that there was reasonable basis for the survivor to fear for her safety. This would account for situations, like mine, where my trafficker had manipulated me to see him as someone who offered safety and protection, rather than the one who facilitated brutal sexual violence against [me as he trafficked me]. This bill would support victims in coming forward in the court process and reduce barriers, which would allow more victims to feel safe to share their allegations over time.

Cassandra ended her testimony by saying, “Canada's trafficking survivors deserve better than what we currently have, and Bill S-224 is that better.”

I would ask my NDP and Liberal colleagues if they believe survivors such as Cassandra, who have made it clear that the bill would make an extreme difference. I know my Liberal and NDP colleagues believe that a survivor deserves better. Do they believe it when survivors say that Bill S-224 is that better?

Canada needs to do much more in its fight against human trafficking, and the proposed bill is an important start. That is why I am pleased to support restoring the text of the bill today, and I urge all my colleagues to support this. I want to thank my colleague from Oshawa for his great work on the bill and all the survivors who have been relentless in calling for this change.

● (1805)

Mr. Vance Badawey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity today to speak about Bill S-224, an act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in persons).

This is a bill that presents the opportunity to consider Canada's criminal justice response to human trafficking.

Human trafficking is a devastating crime that involves recruiting, moving or holding victims in order to exploit these individuals for profit, usually for sexual exploitation or forced labour. Traffickers can control and pressure victims through force or through threats, including mental and emotional abuse and manipulation.

Human traffickers prey on individuals who may be in challenging situations. This could be someone who is not in contact with their family, struggling with their identity, a survivor of abuse or someone in desperate need to work for money. Whatever the reason, victims are often unaware that they are being groomed, as traffickers are often expert manipulators.

Human trafficking can involve crossing borders and, according to the UN, is becoming more difficult to detect. In 2022, for the first time, the UN reported a decrease in the number of victims detected globally. The “Global Report on Trafficking in Persons” posits that this decrease may be due to a lower institutional capacity to detect victims, fewer opportunities to traffic resulting from COVID-19 preventive restrictions and a proliferation of clandestine trafficking locations.

The UN also highlighted that climate change is multiplying trafficking risks. Climate migrants are vulnerable to trafficking, and in

2021, 23.7 million people were displaced by weather-induced natural disasters, while many others crossed borders to escape climate-induced poverty.

Importantly, human trafficking is not just a problem that occurs internationally; it is happening right now in communities across Canada.

Most trafficking convictions in Canada involve Canadian citizens. In some cases, however, they involve permanent residents or foreign nationals who are trafficked into Canada. These individuals may enter the country willingly, only to later find themselves in exploitative situations. For both internationally and domestically trafficked persons, vulnerability to being trafficked is heightened by economic deprivation, lack of opportunity or social isolation. In Canada, this includes population groups such as indigenous women and girls, migrants and new immigrants, members of the LGBTQ2 community, persons with disabilities, children in care and other at-risk youth.

I would also like to underscore the particular impact of human trafficking on indigenous women and girls.

The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls emphasizes the disproportionate impact of human trafficking and sexual exploitation on indigenous women and girls due to intersecting factors that increase the likelihood of being targeted by a trafficker. These include systemic racism, violence against indigenous women and girls, intergenerational trauma from colonization, lack of access to social and economic resources, and colonial assimilation policies.

That is why Canada has continued to demonstrate leadership in combatting human trafficking. Back in 2005, Canada enacted human trafficking offences in the Criminal Code. Those offences have been amended several times—including by our government in 2019 through former Bill C-75, which Conservatives are fond of maligning—to ensure a robust response.

● (1810)

For example, Bill C-75 brought into force a provision that allows prosecutors to prove one of the elements of the human trafficking offence, that the accused exercised control, direction or influence over the movements of a victim, by establishing that the accused lived with or was habitually in the company of the victim. We have heard the Conservatives say they would repeal Bill C-75, so I am curious as to whether they also plan to repeal this provision.

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Moreover, in 2019, the Government of Canada launched the national strategy to combat human trafficking. This strategy is led by Public Safety Canada and is a five-year, whole-of-government approach to address human trafficking. It frames federal activities under the internationally recognized pillars of prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnerships. It also includes a fifth pillar of empowerment, which aims to enhance supports and services for victims and survivors of human trafficking.

Additionally, the Department of Justice's victims fund helps to ensure that victims and survivors of crime have improved access to justice and to give them a more effective voice in the criminal justice system. Since 2012, the Department of Justice has undertaken policy and program development through the federal victims strategy to support non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to provide services and supports for victims and survivors of human trafficking. Since 2018, the victims fund has had an allocation of \$1 million annually to support victims and survivors of human trafficking.

In terms of our legislative approach, the Criminal Code's main trafficking offence prohibits recruiting, transporting or harbouring victims to exploit them or to facilitate their exploitation by someone else under section 279.01. Separate offences criminalize materially benefiting from human trafficking under subsection 279.02(1) and withholding or destroying identity documents, whether authentic or forged, to facilitate human trafficking under subsection 279.03(1). In addition to these adult-trafficking offences, the Criminal Code also contains child-specific human trafficking offences. I stress that all of these offences have extraterritorial application, meaning that a Canadian or a permanent resident who engages in this conduct abroad can be prosecuted in Canada under subsection 7(4.2).

Importantly, convictions have been secured under these offences, including where traffickers have exploited their victims' vulnerabilities without using physical violence. Both the Ontario and the Quebec courts of appeal have found that under the existing human trafficking offences, prosecutors do not need to prove that the victim was actually afraid, that the accused used or threatened the use of physical violence or even that exploitation actually occurred. Prosecutors need only prove that a reasonable person in the victim's circumstances would believe their physical or psychological safety would be threatened if they failed to provide the labour or services required of them.

We look forward to proceeding with this discussion this evening, and I will end my comments here.

● (1815)

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak to Bill S-224, an act to amend the Criminal Code with regard to trafficking in persons.

The adoption of this legislation would remove the unfair burden placed on exploited individuals to prove that there was an element of fear in their abuse. That is very significant, "fear in their abuse". Right now, they have to prove that they were afraid. It is incomprehensible how the Liberals have essentially gutted this entire bill and left it with a title.

We just heard very solemn comments from the previous Liberal member. However, at the same time, the Liberals are actually doing quite the contrary. They are not protecting people, primarily women and girls, from being trafficked.

On the weekend, I heard a presentation from Ally Global Foundation about the work that it is doing worldwide. I saw a video of children from Nepal and other countries, and how they were basically being sold by their families for a very minimal amount of money, or kidnapped, used as sex slaves or used for labour. They are abused and traumatized for the rest of their lives, if not killed.

There are millions of people who are being trafficked around the world. It is modern-day slavery. The thing is that it is not just happening offshore. It is happening here in Canada. It is happening here in Ottawa and where I live, in Maple Ridge, in the Vancouver area. It is happening everywhere.

A lot of what is happening is that these Canadians are lured through the Internet. Children, 12 years old or older, are lured into sex slavery. They are not even aware of what is happening. Then they get caught up in this life and get addicted to drugs. We are seeing a massive increase in the opioid crisis: 42,000 have died in the past number of years. In British Columbia, last year alone, a record 2,500 died. Many of those on drugs have been addicted through human trafficking. That is a big concern.

Conservatives want to bring in significant penalties. We had a mandatory minimum penalty before, which was removed by the Liberal government. Right now, a trafficker can get away with a small fine, \$5,000, with no time in jail, for ruining lives.

We need to take this very seriously. It is spreading its tentacles, and those tentacles need to be cut off. I have a great concern. I am Métis. The indigenous population comprises approximately 4% of Canada's population. An astounding 50% of those who are trafficked in Canada are indigenous. That is devastating.

● (1820)

Indigenous women and girls are being trafficked, and it is destroying our people, my people, our people as Canadians. How can we bring reconciliation? How can we see redemption? How can we see growth and healing? This is something important. The government has an obligation to protect the most vulnerable, who are maybe going through some problems. I think of teenagers. I was a teacher for many years, and we were all teenagers at one time, but youth go through difficult times of feeling vulnerable. They are looking for security and looking for relationships. Traffickers and criminal gangs look for those who are a bit ostracized and they wear them through gifts, attention and so-called love. It is really a way to trap them and to use them for financial purposes. They treat girls and women like objects.

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This is something for which, as legislators, we need to bring in the most stringent of consequences in order to set the people free. In our country, this is unacceptable. Also, I am aware of people who come from other countries, new immigrants, who get caught up in jobs and do not know how to get out of it. It could be through some type of employment like massages, or it could be a variety of things, and the person becomes trapped in this lifestyle and does not know where to turn.

I know this is going to go to committee afterwards. I really am hopeful. I should not say I am hopeful, because I have not seen a lot of evidence on the Liberal side of taking crime very seriously. We have seen a massive increase in assaults, gangs, car thefts and everything. Liberals have reduced the consequences for all sorts of criminal activity, so we see the same people repeating crime time after time.

In Vancouver alone, I believe last year or the year before, the same 40 offenders committed 6,000 crimes that we are aware of. It was just like a turnstile. We cannot have this destructive practice happening. We cannot just let the cancer in there; it needs to come out. We need strong legislation, so I really do hope the Liberals and the NDP supporting them will come to their senses and pass this.

It has already gone through the Senate. I want to thank my colleagues, the MP for Oshawa and the MP for Peace River—Westlock, for their efforts when they brought it in 2019, as well as many others. There are a lot of people who say they are concerned. We hear about it from all sides. We hear about the concern, but let us put that concern into action by changing the legislation.

• (1825)

The Speaker: The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

ELECTORAL REFORM

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening in Adjournment Proceedings to pursue a question that I asked on February 5 of this year. It relates to a very key issue in our democracy, and that is our voting system, the winner-take-all system known as first past the post. We are one of the very few democracies on this planet that uses a system that separates the popular vote from the Parliament that is created from the seat count. It is a perverse system, and, as I put in my question back on February 5, one that many Canadians find unacceptable.

One of the reasons for the Liberals' election victory in 2015, and there is no question about it, was the promise that "2015 will be the last election held under...first-past-the-post". It was in the election platform. It was then put in the Speech from the Throne. I joined a special standing committee of this place that toured Canada, listened to thousands of Canadians, heard from tens of thousands of Canadians. It was created as a standing committee on electoral re-

form to recommend a system that would replace first past the post, because we all believed and, I swear on a stack of Bibles, I believed the Liberal promise that 2015 would be the last election under first past the post.

The job of our committee was to come up with an alternative voting system that would be fair and would ensure that the popular vote was reflected in the Parliament that was created. On February 2, 2017, that promise was broken in spectacular fashion as a new minister, recently shuffled, got up in front of the mics out there and said that it is not in their mandate letter anymore, that they were not changing the voting system. There was then the excuse, the fake excuse, that there was no consensus. The Liberals invented a new condition never previously mentioned. They ran an election. They won based on telling people that 2015 would be the last election under first past the post.

The answer I received from the parliamentary secretary was more than inadequate, but so was the result. My question was this. Would this government at least agree to pass Motion No. 86, which was to create a citizens' assembly so Canadians could have a jury of our peers?

They did not listen to the parliamentary committee. They did not listen to the people of Canada in the vote, who said, yes, we will vote for Liberal candidates because 2015 will be the last election under first past the post.

That motion to create a citizens' jury went down to defeat, but I do not think we should give up on it. What happens when one makes a promise to Canadians and then one walks away from it and one breaks it? It is not that one has walked away from the problem. One has turned one's back on Canadians. One has fed into a well of increasing cynicism, disgust and distrust in the people of this country, in the voters of this country. It is not too late to return. This is what I want to pursue tonight.

How do we return to the promise that was broken and actually keep it? How do we let Canadians know that voting in Canada can become fair, that the way we vote will be reflected in the Parliament we elect? It is not too late.

I put it to this government: "Keep your word, bring the promise back and get rid of first past the post."

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• (1830)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that the leader of the Green Party might not necessarily like this answer, but the truth of the matter is that, back then, there was no consensus achieved. I also know that the leader of the Green Party is very familiar with the history of this debate, not only here in Ottawa, but in other jurisdictions. Other provinces and other political parties, at the provincial level, for many years have been calling for a change to the first-past-the post system, yet all provinces, and here in Ottawa, have continued with first past the post. It has proven to be acceptable to governments, for the most part. Elections have been acceptable. I will acknowledge that there have been some anomalies that have caused a great deal of concern.

Reflecting back on what took place during that 2016-17 period, and the discussions around the table at the time, it became clear that we were not going to be able to achieve consensus. Some people were advocating preferential ballot, as an example, while others were talking about a different form to change elections. At the end of the day, we have seen provinces have independent groups do research into how they believed the province could change the system. That has taken place on several occasions. We have seen referendums at the provincial level.

What I have witnessed over my relatively short term of 30-plus years as a parliamentarian is that first past the post continues to be the preferred choice of Canadians, governments and opposition parties, consistently. At times, the issue of electoral reform does come up. A good percentage of people are very much concerned about it and looking at ways to change the system. Maybe we will see some sort of a change in the future, in particular at a provincial level, where we will be able to look at what that province is doing. Until we can achieve that consensus, I do not believe that we are in a position where we can see the type of change that the leader of the Green Party would like to see. I do not say that lightly.

I have been in a political party in Manitoba where there were only two Liberal MLAs. In fact, my daughter is the only Liberal MLA currently in Manitoba. I understand the arguments on all sides from a number of people who would like to see electoral change. I know of the examples where one party gets a majority of the vote, yet it does not get a majority of the seats.

All in all, when we weigh things out, we find that people are accepting and content with first past the post because it has been working for Canada to date. Until we can build that consensus, I think we need to stick with that.

• (1835)

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the Liberals did not put out an election platform in 2015 that said, "If we can find consensus, we'll change the voting system". No, it was unequivocal. The promise was that 2015 would be the last election under first past the post, not "If we can find consensus". That was invented *ex post facto* after they won the election. Good MPs, like Craig Scott for Toronto Danforth, lost their seats. NDP supporters had gone up to him, saying, "Gee, Craig, I'm really sorry. I've always voted for you, but I'm not going to vote for you this time. I'll

never have to vote strategically again because the Liberals are going to get rid of first past the post".

We believed their lies. It is a damn shame to lie to Canadians. Shame.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, those were strong words that the leader used. I think we need to recognize that there was a genuine attempt to change the system. We surrendered the majority by allowing the majority to be opposition members, including the leader of the Green Party. There was a genuine attempt made, but let us also recognize that we could not get consensus. Therefore, it would not have been appropriate for the government to move forward on the issue.

At the end of the day, I believe it is important that we reflect on what took place. Maybe we can talk about some of those details later, because we do not have the time needed to do so now. I would be more than happy to share some more intimate discussions with the member on this important issue.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo (Port Moody—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, National Caregiver Month is almost over and yet Canada's caregivers are no better off due to the inaction of the government.

Earlier today, my hon. colleague from Hamilton Centre pointed out that workers from SEIU and other personal support workers have been waiting for three years. The government promised that these workers would get help with building their retirement savings. It made these promises in the 2020 fall statement, the 2021 budget and the 2023 budget. Even though \$50 million was allocated for their pension program, that money has not yet flowed. This is unacceptable.

I want to talk about the Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence report that was recently released, which said that caregivers in this country are caring for aged people and are not being compensated appropriately. According to the report, 57% of all caregivers are women, who are not being compensated in the work that they do. Of these caregivers, more than one in five pays more than \$1,000 out of their very own pocket to take care of loved ones. Unpaid caregivers who are already working full-time provide an average of four and a half hours per day caring for their loved ones. This means that on any given week, they are putting in an extra 30 hours of work caregiving.

These costs to our caregivers are continuing to rise as things become more unaffordable. They have to take more time to support their loved ones and they have more expenses. The Liberals said they would fix this, but they continue to let down women as they refuse to make the Canada caregiver tax credit refundable. New Democrats know that Canadian caregivers deserve respect, and we cannot help but show gratitude for the tireless work that paid and unpaid caregivers do every day.

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Care work is the backbone of our society and is essential to our future, but, like the government has shown, it is far too often undervalued and underappreciated. The data shows that caregivers need more support and with the cost of living going up, they need the financial support that has been promised by the government for years.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will get to the answer of the specific question right away, but I wanted to take the opportunity to recognize the valuable role that caregivers provide to our communities in every region of the country. They do incredible work. Because of the fine work they do, people's lives are that much better, and in many ways they get to continue to live in communities, maybe where they have grown up from childhood, and communities in which, maybe because of some sort of a devastating accident, they find themselves in need of having a caregiver.

I wanted to acknowledge at the very beginning how important caregivers are to our communities and to our society and thank them from a personal perspective. I know the feelings I have toward caregivers and the fine work that they do is shared among all members of Parliament. I can definitely speak on behalf of the Liberal caucus because I know that to be true.

I think of what the government has done specifically. The Canada caregiver credit is a non-refundable tax credit for those who have expenses linked to taking care of a disabled or impaired family member. As one example, this tax credit is intended to compensate caregivers for non-discretionary, out-of-pocket expenses incurred while offering care. It applies both for physical and mental impairment and extends to spouses and their families, children or parents. This allows families that are burdened with taking care of an impaired loved one to expense up to \$8,000 on their tax return. There are things that we do that are very direct, and I would suggest that this is direct.

There are also things that take place that are indirect but also very supportive. For example, in the budget, for the first time ever, we have a nationwide disability program, which would see literally hundreds of millions of dollars invested in an area. Many of the recipients who would be receiving this are individuals who are receiving care also. We will see that by providing this sort of additional support. I think it might be the single largest expenditure in a budget line for new programming. It is a significant amount of money.

We are looking at ways in which we can support caregivers, whether directly through deductions or indirectly through ways we can enhance opportunities for or the independence of individuals who have disabilities, and each complements the other.

This is not a government that says we are just going to take a look at one aspect of how we can support caregivers. I think that there are different ways we can not only acknowledge, but support, caregivers and individuals who are recipients of caregivers' actions.

I see that as a positive step forward. It is important that the national government continues to work with other authorities, in particular our provinces, which also provide independent living types of programs and enhanced care programs.

• (1840)

Ms. Bonita Zarrillo: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that at least the member is starting to have a conversation about it and use words around “fine work”. I understand that by “fine work”, he means the 28 years it took for the government to actually have a child care program.

I benefited from a child care program starting in 1995 in Quebec, and many of my colleagues outside of Quebec had to wait 28 years. It was “fine work”, for over 28 years, done by all the women out there who looked after the kids so that many of the MPs in the House could become parliamentary secretaries, ministers and so on.

The fine words are not going to pay the bills, so I would say again that the Liberal government promised this refundable caregiver tax credit. That is a no-brainer. As far as I am concerned, that should be immediate, but I remind the Liberals that they have also promised a pension benefit to personal support workers, such as those at SEIU, who are still waiting to be able to retire.

• (1845)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that the member has acknowledged the deduction issue, but she also, at the beginning of her speech, made reference to child care, and 28 years is a long time. However, we would have had something in place back in, I think, 2004-06, with Paul Martin's proposal for child care, which Ken Dryden did a phenomenal job on. I was very disappointed, as it was there and all in place. Unfortunately, we could not get the support of the New Democrats at that time, and as a result, we ended up losing government. That plan was, sadly, flushed.

Having said that, under this minority government, and after a shuffling of the New Democratic members of Parliament, we were able to bring in a child care program that will ensure \$10-a-day day care. The member is right in that it is very much modelled after what had taken place in Quebec. The Province of Quebec did it right, and because of that, we have a program that is very similar to the Province of Quebec's program. As a result, we have a national child care program.

ETHICS

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to follow up on a straightforward question that the Minister of Employment refuses to answer. How much has the minister been paid by Navis Group since the minister was appointed to cabinet?

The minister's dealings with Navis Group raise serious ethical questions, including whether the minister broke the law by contravening the Conflict of Interest Act.

Adjournment Proceedings

Navis Group is owned by the minister's business partner. The minister was receiving, and continues to receive, payments from Navis Group. As the minister was receiving these payments, Navis Group was lobbying the minister's own department and managed to secure \$110 million in federal contracts for its client. This has all the markings of self-dealing, conflict of interest and corruption.

When the Minister of Employment appeared at committee on the estimates, I asked him about his shady arrangement with Navis Group. The minister effectively said that there was nothing to see here, and that it was all above board. The minister claimed it had been approved by the Ethics Commissioner.

However, the minister's statement at committee was patently false. It was patently false because, in fact, the minister actively concealed from the Ethics Commissioner his connection to Navis Group. More specifically, the minister's disclosure to the Ethics Commissioner conveniently hid behind a numbered company without disclosing that the numbered company was Navis Group. A statement from the Office of the Ethics Commissioner confirms that the Ethics Commissioner was unaware of the minister's connection with Navis Group. Therefore, the Ethics Commissioner was unaware that the company that was paying the minister was simultaneously lobbying the minister's department and successfully securing \$110 million in grants for its client.

What we have is a shady deal, a shady arrangement, that the minister actively concealed from the Ethics Commissioner. When the minister got caught, he attempted to misdirect by peddling the falsehood that it had been approved by the Ethics Commissioner, raising additional questions about the minister's fitness for office. Since this scandal broke, the minister has not had the guts to stand in the House once and answer questions. Instead, the minister has been shielded by other ministers in the government who have dodged and deflected on the minister's behalf.

On behalf of Canadian taxpayers, who have footed the \$110 million bill to Navis Group, how much did the minister pocket from Navis Group? I just need a number.

• (1850)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear and precise on this at the start. The minister has always followed the strict ethics rules that apply to him as an elected official. Canada has one of the strictest ethics regimes in the world for elected officials, and that is exactly what Canadians expect. The minister has always conducted himself in an ethical manner that follows the spirit and letter of those rules. The minister has already addressed this matter. On that particular point, I am going to reflect on what I have witnessed from the official opposition, virtually from day one.

When I say day one, I am talking about the election that was in late 2015. Since our Prime Minister became Prime Minister, the Conservative Party of Canada's focus has been purely on character assassination, whether of the Prime Minister or other ministers, and it has been consistent on that. It did not matter what the circumstances were. The Conservatives will look under every rock and then throw out the word "scandal", and all sorts of negative words,

to try to create something. Often they will create something out of absolutely nothing.

The Conservatives like to get the headline that will say "scandal". If they get a scandal headline, I think they possibly get a gold star in the Conservative back room. There are some members, and I would classify my friend as one of them, who are like a pit bull with a bone. They just do not want to let go until they get five gold stars. That is the type of attitude that I often see. The Conservatives are more focused on that character assassination than on what is actually affecting Canadians.

What have we seen over the last eight or nine years as a government? We have seen a government that has been focused on things such as enhancing Canada's middle class and those aspiring to be a part of it. We have seen a government that has recognized the importance of the generational gap and the need to have that higher sense of fairness. We have seen budget legislation. We have seen other forms of legislation there to support Canadians and have their backs during the pandemic or during difficult times. When there are issues such as inflation and affordability, we have seen a series of measures. We see that because, no matter what the Conservatives try to throw at the government with character assassinations, we continue to be focused on what is important to Canadians.

I can assure members that, going forward, over the next 18 months or, hopefully, beyond, we will see a government that will continue to focus on the interests of Canadians. We will be there to support Canadians in very real and tangible ways. I suspect that we will still continue to see the members of the Conservative Party look under every rock to see what they can find, so they can throw around the word "scandal" as much as they can in the hope that they will be able to get that headline.

If there is anything that tries to make this chamber look dysfunctional, anything that calls characters into question, whether it is justified or not, we can count on the Conservatives to stand and raise issues. That is fine. They are the official opposition, and they can do that. However, I will advise them that, as the Conservatives continue to do that, we will continue to work and be there for Canadians in a very real way.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary claimed that the minister addressed the matter. The minister has done no such thing. Indeed, the minister has refused to stand in the House to answer a single question, and when I asked him a question at committee, he misdirected by falsely claiming that it had been cleared by the Ethics Commissioner when the arrangement clearly had not been.

Here are the facts: The minister was being paid by a firm owned by his business partner that was lobbying his own department, and it secured \$110 million in federal grants for its client. That smacks of a conflict of interest. Is the parliamentary secretary comfortable to stand in the House to tell Canadians that this is the low ethical bar set by the government?

Business of Supply

• (1855)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to say whenever we hear a Conservative say, “Here are the facts,” we should beware. When we think of the pandemic and the billions of dollars that were spent on the pandemic, we will hear the Conservatives say there was a Liberal who owned a particular company and received some sort of grant. They will say it is a huge scandal. However, we will find that for some Liberal entrepreneurs, but also for some Conservative entrepreneurs. I suspect there might even have been some separatist entrepreneurs and New Democrat entrepreneurs.

When we have contracts and procurements and other things that are in place, and when we have an ethics commissioner, I take their efforts a whole lot more sincerely than those of the Conservative opposition, because with everything they see, they try to say things are broken and things are scandalous. That has been non-stop since 2015.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been withdrawn, and the House will now resolve itself into a committee of the whole for the consideration of all votes under Department of Justice in the Main Estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE—MAIN ESTIMATES, 2024-25

(Consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under Department of Justice in the main estimates, Mr. Greg Fergus in the chair)

The Speaker: The House is now in committee of the whole to consider all votes under Department of Justice in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025.

Today's debate is a general one on all votes under Department of Justice. The first round will begin with the official opposition, followed by the government, the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party. After that, we will follow the usual proportional rotation.

[Translation]

Each member will be allocated 15 minutes at a time. This time may be used for both debate and for posing questions. Members wishing to use this time to make a speech have a maximum of 10 minutes, which leaves at least five minutes for questions to the minister. When a member is recognized, he or she should indicate to the Chair how the 15-minute period will be used, in other words, how much time will be used for speeches and how much time will be used for questions and answers.

Also, pursuant to order made earlier today, members who wish to share their time with one or more members shall indicate this to the

Chair, and the Chair will receive no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent.

When the time is to be used for questions and comments, the minister's response should approximately reflect the time taken by the question, since this time will count toward the time allocated to the member.

[English]

Pursuant to order made earlier today, the time provided for the debate tonight may be extended beyond four hours, as needed, to include a minimum of 16 periods of 15 minutes each.

I also wish to indicate that in committee of the whole, comments should be addressed to the Chair. I ask for everyone's co-operation in upholding all of the established standards of decorum, parliamentary language and behaviour.

We will now begin tonight's session.

The hon. member for Fundy Royal.

• (1900)

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to be able to participate this evening in this important debate. I want to state at the outset that I will be splitting my time for the last five minutes with the member for Thornhill.

I am going to start off with an easy question for the minister, just to get things started.

What year did the Liberal Party form its majority government?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party formed majority government in 2015.

Hon. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, 2015 is important, because you are going to hear the number 2015 quite a bit.

I will note, minister, that when you were first appointed, one of the things you said in your new role was that for Canadians it was empirically unlikely that Canada was becoming less safe. I would say Canadians would say that is not true. I would say Statistics Canada would say that is not true.

There has been a shift in the crime rate since 2015 that we are going to talk about this evening. On the serious Criminal Code offences of homicide, have those rates gone up or down since the Liberals formed government in 2015?

The Speaker: Members should address their questions through the Chair.

The hon. Minister of Justice.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the comments from the member for Fundy Royal, what I would say and have said previously in this chamber is that upon my initial appointment, I had not yet received briefings with respect to crime statistics. Since that time, in late August and early September, I received statistical briefings on violent crime statistics, and they have, indeed, gone up in Canada.

Business of Supply

Hon. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, it is tremendously unfortunate that before even being briefed, the minister was telling Canadians that it was all in their heads that we were experiencing a crisis in our justice system, but it is not all in Canadians' heads. The statistics tell us that violent crime has gone up tremendously. In fact, the rate of homicide has gone up 43% since 2015, the highest it has been in 30 years.

What about gang-related homicides? Have those gone up or down since 2015?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, once again I appreciate the first question and the tone, but not the tone of the last two questions.

I never used the term about things being fictitious, etc. I asked for empirical evidence. I have been given the empirical evidence, and that empirical evidence demonstrates that violent crime has gone up.

Hon. Rob Moore: Actually, Mr. Speaker, what the minister said was that his role was to tell Canadians that it was empirically unlikely that Canada is becoming less safe. In fact, violent crime is up 39%.

Now that he has been briefed, could the minister tell us how much, according to Statistics Canada, gang-related homicides have gone up since 2015, only nine years ago?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, what I can indicate to Canadians is that my job as Minister of Justice is to work to keep Canadians safe in their communities and in their homes. I understand that violent crime has gone up. That is why I am taking measures to, indeed, do exactly that. Some of the measures that I have taken include changes to the bail system and proposing different penalties and tougher penalties for things like automobile theft.

Hon. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, just the opposite is true. Every step the government has taken in the last nine years has made the situation worse.

Can the minister tell Canadians tonight how much violent gun crime, according to Statistics Canada, has gone up since 2015?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the member for Fundy Royal has decided to raise issues that relate to gun crimes, because I can indicate to Canadians watching this evening that we take gun violence very seriously. That is why we have taken steps with initiatives such as an assault rifle ban and a national ban and freeze on the sale of handguns. That was done in legislation in Bill C-21, which the member voted against.

Hon. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, if it was not so serious, it would be laughable.

The minister is talking about steps his government has taken, but I will answer the question. Violent gun crime is up 101% since 2015 alone, when the Liberals took office. We are hearing from the minister about what he is doing, but, unfortunately, the statistics tell us that everything they are doing, every step of the way, has been to make Canadians less safe.

Speaking of which, does the minister have the rate of police-reported sexual assault since 2015?

• (1905)

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I would indicate to the member opposite that when he and his party vote against initiatives that keep Canadians safe, I think Canadians question the sincerity of questions like the one he just put to me.

Bill C-21, which I mentioned, talks about a national freeze on the sale, purchase and transfer of handguns. He voted against that. It also increased penalties for firearms trafficking. He voted against that. It also created new offences to help stop ghost guns. He voted against that.

If there was sincerity on the part of the member opposite with respect to tackling the pressing issue of gun violence, I would presume the voting pattern would have been the opposite.

Hon. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, I will answer the question. Sexual assaults are up 71% since 2015, when the Liberals took government, nine years ago. It is beyond ironic that the minister questions why Conservatives on this side would not support their agenda. Of course we do not support their agenda. We want to make Canada a safe place, where kids can play in playgrounds and parents can send their kids to school and not be worried about them. Canada is a less safe place under the government, and the minister, in his answers tonight, has shown no indication whatsoever that he is prepared to reverse course.

On April 21, an individual in Victoria stole a vehicle. He was arrested by the Victoria police, taken before court and let out on bail. On April 22, the same individual stole another vehicle. The police did their job, so let us not blame the police. They arrested him, he was brought before a judge and he was let out on bail. On April 23, three days in a row, this individual was arrested for a third time for breaking into a house to steal a motor vehicle.

Does the minister know where the Victoria police laid the blame for this outrageous development, that someone in Canada could be arrested three times on successive days and be let out on bail each time?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, there were a number of points in there, and I will respond to all of them.

The first point would be that in respect of Canadians' safety, what I would put to him is that Bill C-21, which he voted against, also dealt with intimate partner violence and things like red flag laws. Those have now become law, no thanks to him and his party and their voting pattern. The red flag laws actually allow the police to intercept firearms from the home of someone who is deemed to be a threat to their partner or to other individuals. That is called keeping Canadians safe, so I reject outright the premise of his earlier question.

Business of Supply

With respect to bail, he will be aware that bail is a determination that is made by actors in our justice system, including justices of the peace. We have taken steps to strengthen the bail system to keep Canadians safe. On that piece, I will credit the member. He did vote in favour of Bill C-48, which deals with serious violent repeat offenders, on whom there is now a reverse onus for procuring bail. That is a step in the right direction in keeping Canadians safe.

Hon. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, I notice once again that I have given the minister a lot of opportunities, and he has not answered any of my questions directly.

He knows the answer to this one, and he is not going to give it, so I will have to give it on his behalf. The Victoria Police Department statement says, “Bill C-75, which came into effect nationally in 2019, legislated a 'principle of restraint' that requires police to release an accused person at the earliest possible opportunity”.

The police laid the blame for this individual being released three times in a row to revictimize Canadians squarely at the feet of the minister. A woman was injured in the process of one of the thefts.

On the issue of the Liberals' draconian Bill C-63, which Margaret Atwood has described as “Orwellian”, has he completed a charter statement for this bill that clearly threatens the rights of Canadians?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I find this line of questioning quite fascinating, given that the main charter issue that is at issue in Bill C-63 deals with very sensitive issues about the protection of freedom of speech, which is protected under section 2(b).

What I will do is always maintain my oath under the Constitution to uphold the Constitution and people's charter rights. This individual works under a leader who has brandished the idea of using the notwithstanding clause to deprive people of their charter rights. Section 2(b) is subject to the notwithstanding clause.

If we are talking about who is actually committed to protecting people's freedoms, including freedom of speech, people on that side of the House should be looking at themselves in the mirror.

• (1910)

Ms. Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how many cars were stolen in Canada in 2015?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I can indicate is that auto theft is on the rise in Canada right now.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, does the minister know the number of cars stolen in 2015?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I am aware that auto theft is on the rise in Canada as we speak.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, I will give him one more opportunity. Does he know the number of cars stolen in 2015? It is not a difficult question.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I am aware that car theft is on the rise in Canada. That is why we are taking aggressive steps to address it, including in the fall economic statement, including in the budget and including in the national action plan to deal with auto theft, which was announced on Monday.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, for those watching at home who see that the minister does not want to answer questions, I will answer it for him. It is 78,849. Now, does the minister know how many cars were stolen in 2022?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, the number I am being provided with from officials is 105,673.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, he does have answers to these questions.

Can the minister tell us what percentage increase in car theft has taken place between 2015 and 2022?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I am sure the member for Thornhill has a calculator and can do that calculation.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, I will ask the minister again for a non-condescending answer.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I am aware that car thefts have gone up, and the number of car thefts in Canada in 2022 is 105,673 vehicles.

If the member is committed to combatting auto theft, what I would put to her is that she should get behind the fall economic statement and budget 2024, which deal with auto theft initiatives.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, the answer is 34.1%, and I am sure the Minister of Justice also can find a calculator.

Can he tell us the percentage increase in car thefts from 2015 to 2022 in the province of Ontario, his province and mine?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the number of car thefts is up in various provinces around the country. I do not have the statistics for Ontario.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, it is 122.5% in Ontario. How about just in Toronto?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I am in contact with law enforcement in Toronto, including the TPS, and they have advised me that car thefts are up. I do not have the specific quantum. What I can reflect to the member opposite is that we are taking aggressive steps to deal with car theft in Toronto and throughout the country.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, if he was in contact with law enforcement or if he read the newspaper, then he would know that it is 300%.

How many cars have been stolen from the Minister of Justice?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I have never had my personal car stolen.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, that is very clever. How many cars were stolen from the former minister of justice before the current minister?

Business of Supply

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I am aware that the previous minister's car, which was provided to him in his capacity as minister, was taken from him twice.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, it has been three times since 2019. Does the minister not agree that car theft is a problem?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, if the member for Thornhill was listening, I had indicated that car theft is on the rise. Car theft is a serious problem. I have said that at the microphone many times, and we have taken significant steps to address it.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, will the minister answer a question about why he would not support mandatory minimum sentences for those who repeat stealing cars in Ontario, all over Canada and in Toronto?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated in this chamber, there is already a mandatory minimum sentence in place for people who are repeat offenders for auto theft.

Ms. Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, it is well known that the cars that are stolen end up in the port of Montreal, or at least many of them do. There are 1.7 million containers at the port of Montreal. How many of them are scanned?

• (1915)

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I can indicate to the member opposite that we put \$28 million toward scanning more of those containers, and that has resulted in the interception of over 1,000 cars by CBSA in 2024, including at the port of Montreal.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I would invite you to speak with the table officers, but my understanding is that when we are in committee of the whole, answers are to be balanced proportionately to the time that is provided in the question. I wrote down the times, and in one case, by my rough calculation, and this is by no means scientific, there was actually a 14-second disparity. I would ask that you please enforce that and enforce it strictly, if I am in fact correct on this.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member. There was one question where the hon. minister had gone over time and the Chair was giving indication, as all members saw me doing. I do want to indicate, though, that according to the rules, as I mentioned at the front end, and I will do this in a free translation, we do say that the time of answer of the minister should correspond roughly, *à peu près*, to the time that was put for the question. In most cases, the time came in under time.

I can assure the hon. member that I have been keeping track of this. I will continue to do so, and I will endeavour to make sure that the members' times are entirely respected.

The hon. minister has 15 minutes.

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be providing 10 minutes of remarks, and I will be welcoming questions from my parliamentary secretary, the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore. I will be using my time to discuss measures in the recent budget to combat crime, especially auto theft and money laundering. I will also touch on legal aid investments and provide an update of our work on online safety.

[Translation]

Auto theft is a serious problem that affects communities across the country. Not only does it affect people's wallets, it also causes them to feel unsafe. The number of these thefts has risen and, in some areas, they are growing more violent. These criminals are increasingly emboldened. Our government is committed to ensuring that police and prosecutors have the tools they need to respond to cases of auto theft, including thefts related to organized crime.

We also want to ensure that the legislation provides courts with the wherewithal to impose sentences commensurate with the seriousness of the crime. The Criminal Code already contains useful provisions for fighting auto theft, but we can do more.

[English]

This is why we are amending the Criminal Code to provide additional measures for law enforcement and for prosecutors to address auto theft. Bill C-69, the budget implementation act, sets out these proposed measures. These amendments would include new offences targeting auto theft and its links to violence and organized crime; new offences for possession and distribution of a device used for committing auto theft, such as key-programming machines; and a new offence for laundering proceeds of crime for the benefit of, at the direction of, or in association with, a criminal organization. We are proposing a new aggravating factor at sentencing, which would be applied to an adult offender who involves a young person in the commission of the crime. These changes are part of the larger federal action plan on combatting auto theft that was just released on May 20.

[Translation]

Auto theft is a complex crime, and fighting it involves many partners: the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments, industry leaders and law enforcement agencies.

[English]

I will now turn to the related issue of money laundering. Addressing money laundering will help us to combat organized crime, including its involvement in automobile theft. However, the challenges associated with money laundering and organized crime go beyond auto theft.

• (1920)

[Translation]

That is why we are continually reviewing our laws so that Canada can better combat money laundering, organized crime and terrorist activity financing.

*Business of Supply**[English]*

Bill C-69 would give us more tools to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. These new measures would allow courts to issue an order that requires a person to keep an account open to assist in the investigation of a suspected criminal offence. Currently, financial service providers often unilaterally close accounts where they suspect criminal activity, which can actually hinder police investigations. This new proposed order would help in that regard.

I hope to see non-partisan support from all parties, including the official opposition, on these measures to address organized crime. It would be nice to see its members support something, rather than simply use empty slogans or block actual solutions. We see this as well in their efforts to block Bill C-59, the fall economic statement, which has been in this chamber for literally months. That also contains a range of measures to combat money laundering, which have been asked for by law enforcement. For a party that prides itself on having a close relationship with law enforcement, I find this obstruction puzzling.

[Translation]

What is more, under Bill C-69, the courts will also be authorized to make an order for the production of documents for specific dates thanks to a repetitive production order. That will enable law enforcement to ask a person to provide specific information to support a criminal investigation on several pre-determined dates over a defined period. That means that the individual will be required to produce specific information to support a criminal investigation on several pre-determined dates.

These two proposals resulted from the public consultations that our government held last summer. We are committed to getting Bill C-69 passed by Parliament in a timely manner so that the new measures can be put in place as quickly as possible and so that we can crack down on these serious crimes as soon as possible.

[English]

I would now like to discuss our investments in legal aid. Just as we need to protect Canadians from crime, we also need to ensure that people have equitable access to justice, which is an integral part of a fair and just society, and a strong legal aid system is a key aspect of this. It strengthens the overall justice system. Budget 2024 includes measures to increase funding to criminal legal aid as well as legal aid for immigrants and for refugees to Canada.

For criminal legal aid, budget 2024 provides \$440 million over five years, starting in 2024-25. This would support access to justice for Canadians who are unable to pay for legal support, in particular, indigenous people, individuals who are Black and other racialized communities who are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Indeed, legal representation helps to clear backlogs and delays in our court system as well.

This essential work is only possible with continued collaboration between federal, provincial and territorial governments. The proposed increase to the federal contribution will assist provinces and territories to take further actions to increase access to justice. This legal aid will help with the backlogs I just mentioned. Unrepresented and poorly represented litigants cause delays in our justice system. Making sure that these individuals have proper support and

representation will help ensure access to a speedy trial. This, in combination with our unprecedented pace of judicial appointments, 106 appointments in my first nine months in office, will also address backlogs. In comparison, the previous Harper government would appoint 65 judges per year on average. I exceeded that amount in six months.

For immigration and refugee legal aid, budget 2024 would provide \$273.7 million over five years, starting in 2024-25, and \$43.5 million per year ongoing after that. This funding would help support access to justice for economically disadvantaged asylum seekers and others involved in immigration proceedings. This investment would help maintain the confidence of Canadians in the government's ability to manage immigration levels, and to resettle and integrate refugees into Canadian society. To do this very important work, Justice Canada continues to collaborate with provincial governments and with legal aid service providers, as well as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Together, we are exploring solutions to support sustainable access to immigration and refugee legal aid services.

Before I conclude, I would like to talk a little about Bill C-63, which was raised by the member for Fundy Royal. The bill addresses online harms and the safety of our communities online. Much has already been said about this very important legislation, which would create stronger protections for children online and better safeguards for everyone in Canada from online hate and other types of harmful content. What is critical about this bill is that it is dedicated to promoting people's participation online and not to limiting it.

This legislation is informed by what we have heard over five-plus years of consultations with diverse stakeholders, community groups, law enforcement and other Canadians. This bill focuses on the baseline responsibilities of social media platforms to manage the content they are hosting and their duty to keep children safe, which means removing certain types of harmful content and entrusting a duty to act responsibly.

This bill is about keeping Canadians safe, which is my fundamental priority and my fundamental duty as the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of this country. It is about ensuring that there is actually a takedown requirement on the two types of most harmful material: child pornography and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, also known as revenge pornography.

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There are five other categories of material that would be dealt with under this bill, including material that includes inciting violence, incitements to terrorism, hatred as defined by the Supreme Court of Canada, bullying a child and also inducing a child to self-harm. I am speaking now not only as the Minister of Justice but also as a father. I think that there is nothing more basic in this country for any parent or parliamentarian than keeping our children safe.

I am thankful for the opportunity to speak about how we are making Canada safer and making our justice system stronger, more accessible and more inclusive for all people.

• (1925)

Mr. James Maloney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, let me start by thanking the minister for his remarks and saying that it is a privilege to serve alongside him in his capacity as Minister of Justice.

The minister made some remarks about our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Throughout my entire adult life, this has been a document that Canadians have come to rely on, and the expectation is that their rights will be protected. However, about two weeks ago, the leader of the official opposition said something that can only be described as astonishing. In fact, it is frightening. He told Canadians that he, and he alone, would be the sole arbiter of my rights, and all Canadians' rights, which he would defend. That is not the way Canada works. That is not the way the federal government works. Never in the history of our country has the federal government ever invoked the notwithstanding clause.

Perhaps the minister could expand on his comments, on the importance of the charter and on this reckless suggestion by the Leader of the Opposition.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has a maximum of one minute and 10 seconds.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, Canadians need to understand what the charter protects. It protects freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of association, lawful assembly and Canadians' right to equality. It also protects Canadians' right to be presumed innocent under the law. These are quite fundamental.

What I find absolutely cavalier and astonishing is that instead of speculation, we have the Leader of the Opposition, a man who would purport to one day trying to become prime minister, openly declaring that he would use a clause within that document to trample on those charter rights.

That is really quite astonishing. First, because it has never been done before at the federal level, and that is for good reason. With the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, we do not get to sort of cherry-pick which rights we are talking about and which rights we would purport to defend. The Leader of the Opposition talked about it in the context of criminal justice reform that he would purport to put in place.

Next, the charter deals with protections of things such as women's reproductive rights, Canadians' ability to marry the person they choose and their ability to use pronouns of their choice. These are fundamental rights for Canadians, and they deserve to be protected.

Mr. James Maloney: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the minister could just reinforce the difference between the Liberal government's position and the position taken by the Leader of the Opposition, just so that Canadians can be assured, as long as this government is in power.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, we are the party that invented the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We created it and passed it into law.

We are the party that will always stand by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and that includes all charter rights and freedoms. We do not selectively choose some of them. We will defend every Canadian's rights under the charter, and not cavalierly invoke the notwithstanding clause.

• (1930)

Mr. James Maloney: Mr. Speaker, I will move on to a different subject.

We are talking about court delays. I practised law in Ontario for 20 years before I had the privilege of serving in this House. We all know that court delays are caused by multiple different factors.

Perhaps the minister could share his thoughts on some of those other factors, including the provincial government's role in and responsibility for the court system.

The Speaker: The hon. minister has 22 seconds.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, the first point I would make is that I have appointed 106 judges in nine months, with respect to the heckles opposite. That is the fastest rate in modern Canadian history.

The second point I would make is that if all judicial vacancies evaporated, and there are only 6% around the country, we would still have issues that relate to court infrastructure, court personnel, backlogs and delays that are a result and a by-product of COVID and the need to modernize our court processes.

Mr. James Maloney: Mr. Speaker, on that point, the Liberal government, shortly after it was elected, increased the judicial complement in this country, including here in Ontario.

Perhaps the minister could take a moment to share with us the number of judicial appointments he has made since he was appointed as minister.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, we have increased the number of judges in this country over the last nine years by 116 in total.

The number of judges that I have been able to appoint in nine short months in this office is 106. The average of the Harper government, annually, was 65. We are literally working at twice the rate of the previous Conservative government.

Mr. James Maloney: Madam Chair, I will get back to this later, but perhaps the minister could briefly touch upon, and reinforce, the changes that were made by the government to the appointment process that have enhanced the quality of the bench.

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Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the changes that have been made reflect a comprehensive questionnaire that looks at the lived experience of the individuals. We have put an emphasis on women, bilingualism and diversity. That has resulted in a level of appointments where 54% are women, and there have been 730 appointments so far. The previous government's track record was 30%.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Kristina Michaud (Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Madam Chair, this is my first Committee of the Whole. I am very pleased to be here this evening. I am going to be using a question and answer format, if that is okay. I will ask a question and then let the minister answer it.

I am going to jump right into my questions, starting with the topic of appointing judges. Obviously, the timely appointment of judges is essential to a fair and equitable justice system. As we know, there are a number of judicial vacancies. Justice Wagner sent a letter to the Prime Minister, asking him to fill the vacancies. As of today, there are still 57 vacancies to be filled. Can the minister tell us whether these posts will be filled by the end of the year?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Chair, what I can say is that I will do my best to fill any vacancies across the country. I want to point out that the number of vacancies in Quebec has diminished significantly since I took office. I am working very closely with the chief justices of the Quebec Court of Appeal, the Quebec Superior Court and the Attorney General of Quebec. As I just mentioned, I have already made 106 judicial appointments in my first nine months in office. That is a record-breaking number in modern Canadian history.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Chair, I thank the minister for his efforts. Can he tell us how many positions still need to be filled in Quebec and when they will be filled?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I will try to find the exact figures for Quebec, but I am sure that there are not many vacancies in Quebec at this time.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Chair, how does the minister explain the significant delays in appointing judges? I understand that he has appointed several judges this year, but it is still taking too long.

How does he explain that?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, when I was appointed, I was shocked to learn that the delays were caused by the need for security screening. Of course that is necessary, but with the changes I have put in place, we have created a triage system where judges are considered before other public servants.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Speaker, is that how we can improve the way judges are appointed in a timely manner? Is that the strategy he is proposing or is he working on a plan to improve the process?

• (1935)

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Speaker, the process has improved because the candidate assessments are now valid for three months instead of two and the mandates of the judicial advisory committee members are now three years instead of two years.

To answer the previous question, the Court of Appeal needs two judges and the Quebec Superior Court needs six.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Chair, I thank the minister for those details.

I would now like him to talk about the Jordan decision, which has returned with a vengeance in Quebec in recent years. Recent decisions have brought to light the serious problems in our justice system in terms of delays.

Last weekend at the Festival international du journalisme de Carleton-sur-Mer, which took place in my riding, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court said that we are looking at the problem from the wrong side. Yes, the Jordan decision imposes timelines, but that benefits victims. When we think about the timelines, we rarely think about the victims. Because of the Jordan decision, they do not have to wait for years before they can testify. He also added that we should not seek to change the Jordan decision to extend the deadlines, but instead we should improve our justice system so that it is able to meet those deadlines. That requires massive investments in justice and the quick appointment of judges.

Does the minister agree with the Chief Justice?

I would also like to know what he is doing to improve delays in the justice system.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, on a number of occasions, I have done my best to reduce the court backlogs. Obviously, that involves appointing judges. I am doing my best to fill those positions. In addition, I am currently working with Chief Justice Wagner on a committee on modernizing court operations. The committee is working on ways to improve processes in courts across Canada. For example, in the digital age, we are trying to find ways to speed up justice using artificial intelligence for complainants or people appearing before our courts, whether in a criminal or civil trial.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Chair, I would now like to hear what the minister has to say about the sensitive issue of medical assistance in dying. Yesterday, the Bloc Québécois introduced a bill to allow people suffering from an incapacitating disease, such as Alzheimer's or dementia, to make an advance request for medical assistance in dying while they are still capable of doing so.

The bill is supported by Sandra Demontigny, the Collège des médecins, the Barreau du Québec, the Chambre des notaires du Québec and the Quebec and Canadian associations for the right to die with dignity.

Will the minister commit to taking a compassionate approach consistent with the steps taken by the Government of Quebec to meet the needs of people suffering from serious and incurable neurocognitive diseases by supporting the principle of this bill to allow advance requests in Quebec?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I believe that the member is referring to Bill C-390, tabled in the House just yesterday. We are currently in the process of analyzing and studying this bill. What I can point out is that I am already in contact with my Quebec government counterpart, Simon Jolin-Barrette. We have already discussed this proposal. We are going to have further conversations about Quebec's priorities and objectives.

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I want to emphasize that, when it comes to medical assistance in dying, a balance must always be struck between individual autonomy and the protection, conditions and precautions required to safeguard the most vulnerable. I am always guided by the quest for balance in this matter.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Chair, I would point out to the minister that he does not want to give Quebec an exemption from the Criminal Code, but he is giving one to British Columbia. In my view, this is something that is possible for the people in this situation in Quebec.

Now, I would like to hear his comments on all the issues related to child pornography, children's access to pornography and the sharing of non-consensual content. To my eyes, the purpose of Bill S-210, which was introduced by Senator Julie Miville-Dechéne and which seeks to prevent minors from accessing pornography, is completely different from the purpose of Bill C-63, which the minister introduced and which seeks to protect the public from harmful content streamed on social media, such as intimate content communicated without consent and content that sexually victimizes a child.

Does he agree with me that these two bills have completely different purposes?

• (1940)

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, that is a great question, but I believe that the senator's bill, Bill S-210, addresses only one aspect of our broader bill, C-63.

Protecting children from pornography and sexual predators is a priority for both me and the senator. However, we have different ways of tackling the problem. We are dealing with a much bigger and broader problem in our own Bill C-63. We are also different when it comes to the mandates and the modus operandi that the senator proposes to use.

We are concerned about how to verify someone's age. Does it have to be a piece of government-issued ID? Will this cause other problems or lead to the possibility of other crimes, such as financial fraud, at the international level?

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Chair, I think that the minister is well aware that those are two completely different missions. Both are commendable.

Bill C-63 has its good points, but Bill S-210 really seeks to check the age of pornography users to limit young people's access to it. The Liberal Party seems to disagree with this bill, and yet other countries, like Germany, France and the United Kingdom, as well as some states in the U.S. are looking into this way of verifying the age of users.

Why does Canada not want to move forward in this way to limit the access of children under the age of 18 to pornography?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, with all due respect, I want to correct the member opposite.

First, Bill C-63 deals mainly with types of content that are appropriate for children. Second, it addresses the obligation to protect children. There is also a provision of Bill C-63 that talks about age appropriate design features.

We are targeting the same problem. We want to work with social media platforms to resolve this situation in a way that will enable us to protect people's privacy and personal information and protect children.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Chair, I politely beg to differ. I feel that Bill C-63 is extremely important, but it is not exactly the same thing. Yes, it contains elements that make it possible to regulate or, at least, be warned before consuming certain types of content, but there is nothing that really makes it possible to verify the consumer's age.

I would therefore advise the government to support a bill like Bill S-210. Obviously, it is not easy to implement this type of safeguard, and other countries are currently looking at that. However, it is an extremely important bill.

To return to Bill C-63, would the minister agree that the first part of the bill could be split from the rest so that the digital security commission could be created as quickly as possible? That would enable us to protect female victims of intimate content communicated without consent, including deepfakes.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I have several answers to give on this matter. The big difference between the senator's bill and Bill C-63 is that our bill had the benefit of a five-year consultation. That is the first thing.

The second thing is that, although we agree with some aspects, we want to work in close collaboration with the big digital companies to resolve the situation and protect the public and children from pornography. Taking down that information and content within a mandatory 24-hour period is a much stronger measure than what was proposed in the bill introduced by the senator.

The last thing is that we are targeting a situation where all harmful online content needs to be addressed. This concerns children, teenagers and adults. We want a big solution to a big problem. Australia started nine years ago with children only. Nine years later, protecting children only is no longer appropriate—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Chair, the government is completely ignoring Bill S-210. Bill C-63 is a huge bill that has received some criticism. It is likely to take a long time to study.

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However, we think the proposal to set up a digital safety commission is a good idea that should be implemented quickly. That is why we are proposing that the bill be split, quite simply, so that we can take the time to properly study all harmful content while still setting up the digital safety commission quickly. I understand that the proposal has not been accepted, but I still think it is a good idea.

The topic of harmful content brings me to hate speech. Will the minister commit to abolishing the Criminal Code exemption that allows hate speech in the name of religion? In fact, that would be a great addition to his Bill C-63.

• (1945)

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the member asked two questions.

First, the harmful content that we are targeting in our bill involves young people, adolescents and adults and has to do with violence, bullying or the harassment of a child and hate. Some children are also victims of hate. The suggestion to divide hate, which has already been defined by the Supreme Court of Canada, is problematic to us to be sure. We want to protect all Canadians of all ages from any harmful content.

Second, with respect to what she suggested, I believe that there is another bill that was introduced by the Bloc Québécois having to do with the capacity to defend oneself against the offence of fomenting hatred. We are studying that bill.

Ms. Kristina Michaud: Madam Chair, it is indeed Bill C-367, which was introduced by the member for Beloeil—Chambly and leader of the Bloc Québécois, that simply seeks to eliminate this religious exemption. I hope that the government and the minister will be in favour of this bill.

I will ask a simple question to close: Will the minister finally implement an organized crime registry?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I think that the suggestion about hate, the Bloc Québécois's private member's bill and our Bill C-63 highlight the fact that we need to pass this bill at second reading and send it to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights so that we can study it, hear from experts and witnesses and propose amendments, if a few turn out to be appropriate.

[English]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Madam Chair, I wish to notify the Chair that I am going to be using my 15 minutes to delve right into questions. I appreciate having this opportunity to speak with the minister at the committee of the whole regarding the estimates for the department.

I want to get started on a question regarding legal aid. I note that in these main estimates, the contributions for criminal legal aid would decrease by \$57 million, from \$193.8 million to \$136.8 million. One of the biggest barriers to justice in this country is being able to afford legal representation. Too often, the most vulnerable Canadians do not have access to competent legal assistance in an already overburdened justice system. While legal aid is primarily the responsibility of provincial governments, there is a role for the federal government in providing funding.

Can the minister explain why the amounts allocated to contributions for criminal legal aid are being reduced in such a substantial way?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Chair, I can simply say that is actually an incorrect understanding of what is in the estimates. What is happening there is that we are seeing money that was a one-off allocation that is being eliminated.

However, as I mentioned in my 10-minute speech, what is in budget 2024 is a five-year horizon of criminal legal aid that expands the envelope to much greater than it previously was, with \$440 million over five years being provided to criminal legal aid through budget 2024, and \$270 million over five years for immigration and refugee legal aid. That is a sum total of \$710 million being provided to legal aid in those two categories over the next five years, which is a dramatic increase.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, could the minister commit, with those figures he just cited, to making sure they are going to be a new floor and not a ceiling in the future?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I can double down on my personal commitment to legal aid, as a lawyer and as the Minister of Justice. Obviously, I cannot bind future parliaments with any pronouncement on the floor today.

• (1950)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, I want to turn to the subject of criminal records. Twice the Liberal government has been asked, and twice it has not answered, whether and how it will meet its legal requirement to sequester the criminal records for simple possession of drugs for more than 250,000 Canadians. The legal deadline is coming this November, and Canadians are rightly asking whether they will be notified that their records have indeed been sequestered.

I do not need to remind the House that these kinds of records for offences that are no longer offences impact the ability of people to seek employment or housing, or to travel abroad to visit loved ones. The records also disproportionately impact indigenous and racialized Canadians and those living in poverty.

Could the minister please inform me as to how the government will meet the legal November deadline and inform the Canadians affected as to how they would know their criminal records have been sequestered?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I appreciate the intervention of the member opposite, and I share his passion for addressing issues, including things that have a disproportionate impact on different communities, including racialized communities. What I can say is that the issue he is raising has been touched upon by Bill C-5, which proposes amendments that would need to be made. The Minister of Public Safety is working diligently on this very issue and is working within the parameters of the deadline that he just mentioned, November 2024, to address the amendments that are needed to deal with simple possession and those records.

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Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, could the minister correctly inform me, through the committee of the whole, that the November deadline will be met?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, again, the lead on this issue is the Minister of Public Safety. I know he is working with provincial and territorial counterparts with pace in his effort to meet that deadline.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, I want to change the subject now. I have a quick question for the minister. Does he agree with me that the illegality of Israeli settlements is one of the most firmly established issues in modern international law?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, my understanding is that we have made very public statements, as the Government of Canada, about the nature of the settlements in the occupied territories being deemed illegal.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, does the minister agree with me that Canada has a duty to act within its jurisdiction with respect to the subject of illegal Israeli settlements?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, what I would say to the member opposite is this: We have been quite vocal with respect to the nature of the settlements' being illegal, in terms of the statements we have been making over the last year with respect to the conflict in the region.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, with respect, I just need a simple yes or no answer from the minister.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I have given my response.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, in March there were several events in Canadian communities in which real estate sales of settlement homes in occupied Palestinian territory were promoted and real estate was potentially sold. There was a real estate tour called the Great Israeli Real Estate Event, which was held in Montreal and Toronto.

Israel's far right government has been expanding and authorizing illegal settlements at a rate that exceeds those of all previous years. Settlements are illegal under international law, and under Canadian policy they are an impediment to peace. They should be a priority of the department, given that this is illegal under domestic law and also given the increasing settler violence in the West Bank, which the minister's government acknowledged last week when it imposed sanctions on extremist settlers.

Has the minister's department investigated these illegal sales that may violate the Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Act, which lists population transfer by occupying powers as a recognized war crime under domestic law?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I can reiterate that we have made quite public statements, both on our own and also with the governments of Australia and New Zealand, with respect to the settlements and their status at international law.

I can also reiterate that, pursuant to a motion proposed by the member opposite's party, and we voted on that motion, I believe, in March, we are taking the actions needed with respect to certain individuals from those settlements. This includes taking actions on sanctioning extremist settlers. We did exactly that last week by naming four extremist settlers for sanctions.

Those are the actions the Government of Canada has taken.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, that is all very clear, but I am looking at the investigation of the particular potential sales that happened here on Canadian soil. I would like the minister to comment on that specifically. I think Canadians have a very deserved right to know.

• (1955)

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, with respect to the settlements, I can indicate that we deemed them to be illegal at law, as we have pronounced in statements that have been given by our government and by the governments of Australia and New Zealand.

We have also taken steps to issue sanctions against settlers from those regions who are taking extremist actions, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, I want to know what work the minister is personally doing to make sure that there is an investigation and potential prosecution of people in Canada who are facilitating the purchasing of property, investments or businesses in illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the member opposite knows, as a former member of the justice committee, that decisions about investigations and potential prosecution for criminality, whether it is here or abroad, are undertaken, as they need to be in a democracy, by entities such as the free-standing and independent department of public prosecution, the director of public prosecutions, or the war crimes unit. Those are not handled or directed by me—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, I understand that very well. That does not preclude the minister from issuing broad statements about what the government expects.

Again, I would like to hear an answer from the minister.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I can indicate that the Minister of Foreign Affairs has been very vocal with respect to the status at international law of the settlements and also taking action with respect to sanctioning extremist settlers. That happened last week.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, with respect, the minister is being quite evasive. I am not talking about the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I am not talking about Israeli settlements abroad. I am talking about Canadians who may have broken the law here in Canada regarding the purchase of properties in the occupied Palestinian territories being done here on Canadian soil. I would like a specific answer to that specific question. That is not under the purview of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. That is under the purview of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

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Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the purview of the Attorney General of Canada, with respect to the conduct of litigation, is not to wade into criminal prosecutions. There is a very strong line that has existed for over 20 years. That is why we have a Director of Public Prosecutions Act. That is why we have an arm's-length entity and an individual who is the director of public prosecutions so we do not have potential political direction being given about investigating crimes or laying charges in this country in any respect.

If people have evidence of a potential crime being committed, they should contact law enforcement, not the Office of the Attorney General of Canada.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, will the minister personally instruct the war crimes division of Justice Canada to conduct enhanced human rights due diligence for all real estate transactions made in Canada or by Canadian citizens that involve illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I just want to reiterate for the member opposite, because it is really fundamental that he and every Canadian watching understand that the war crimes unit operates at arm's length from me. It does not take directions from me with respect to potential domestic law violations or international law violations. That is critical and really separates us as a nation-state that believes in democracy, having that important division—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, there is nothing precluding the minister from setting out certain expectations. I think that is very well and good to be established, and still keeping an organization within the Justice Department at arm's length.

I want to move on. Today I subbed in at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, which is currently looking at the issues of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. It is quite obvious that Jews across Canada are reporting a terrifying increase of hate directed toward them as an identifiable group.

One of the recommendations that emerged at today's meeting was to ban symbols of hate. My colleague, the NDP member for New Westminster—Burnaby, has introduced Bill C-229, which would amend the Criminal Code to broaden the provisions related to hate propaganda by making it an offence to publicly display visual representations that promote or incite hatred or violence against an identifiable group. Can the minister comment on this particular initiative and whether the Government of Canada will support it?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I am pleased to see any efforts that deal with combatting hatred, which is unfortunately spiralling in terms of anti-Semitic incidents and Islamophobic incidents. There is a 130% rise in hate crimes in this country in the last five years. That informs the necessity for bills such as Bill C-63, the online harms bill, which will tackle things like hatred and its festering online, which has real-world consequences. It is very unfortunate that Canada ranks number one in the G7 for the number of deaths of Muslims in the last seven years, 11 in total, due to Islamophobic acts of hate.

What I would say, with respect to this bill, is that we are looking at it closely. I would also reiterate for the member's edification that we amended the hate propaganda provisions to include Holocaust

denialism and willful promotion of anti-Semitism within the fold of sections 318 and 319, the hate propaganda offences. That was done within the last two years, I believe.

● (2000)

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, members from all sides of the House have supported the creation of a new offence in the Criminal Code for coercive and controlling behaviour. Bill C-332 is scheduled to return to the House for report stage and third reading next week.

Can the minister tell me when the government will act and implement the changes to the Criminal Code that are urgently needed to protect survivors, families and children who are at risk of coercive and controlling behaviour and escalating threats of harm and violence?

Is the government committed to fast-tracking the implementation of the legislation, given the all-party support?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, we are very aware of Bill C-332. I thank the member for the fact that this bill was generated from his party, and also for the fact that there was a lot of collaborative work that was done to make strategic amendments to improve the content of that bill.

My understanding is that this bill is coming up for third reading, and we are very dedicated as a government and as a party to addressing issues of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence. Coercive control is part of that continuum. The fact that other nation-states with which we are allies have addressed this issue already prompts us to act at a faster pace to try and ensure that this bill becomes law as soon as possible, at least through its passage through the House of Commons and off to the Senate.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Madam Chair, yesterday the House of Commons voted to defeat Bill C-381. There is obviously no evidence that mandatory minimums work as a deterrent. This was in the case of extortion in the Criminal Code. There is even evidence that they might hinder the work of a prosecutor to use plea bargaining to obtain evidence for the arrest of other members of a criminal organization. However, there are legitimate fears among the South Asian community regarding the increase in extortion from criminal organizations.

How the minister is dealing with this particularly sensitive issue? How will he be directing his department's resources to address these growing fears?

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Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, extortion is a Criminal Code violation currently and there is already a mandatory minimum penalty that applies to repeat extortion with a firearm. The mandatory minimum is seven years. The maximum penalty for extortion is life imprisonment. With respect to not tolerating extortion, what we are doing is looking closely and trying to work with law enforcement officials to understand the nature of the problem, particularly in the South Asian community in B.C. and in Ontario, to target this in a more robust manner.

I would also encourage the member to look at what we are doing with Bill C-70, the foreign interference legislation that we recently tabled in this House, which looks at organized criminality that is being orchestrated by criminal elements that are operating abroad but manifesting here.

Mr. James Maloney (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Chair, it is a pleasure to rise again this evening to join this conversation that is so central to our democracy. There is something I want to talk about, that I touched on earlier, about federally appointed judges and our judiciary in Canada, which is one of the strongest in the world, in my opinion. We are very fortunate in Canada to have an independent and highly regarded judiciary that is respected around the world.

Canada's exceptional superior court judges are appointed through a robust, independent process, a process that our government was proud to establish in 2016. This process emphasizes transparency, merit and the diversity of the Canadian population. It continues to ensure that Canadian superior court judges meet the highest standards of excellence and integrity.

Our government considers judicial appointments a priority. We recognize that a strong and independent superior court judicial appointment process is crucial to public confidence in our justice system. That is why, in October of 2016, our government implemented significant reforms to the superior court judicial appointment process. These changes were designed to increase the openness and transparency of the process, promote diversity on the superior court bench and help bolster Canadians' confidence in the process by which their superior court judges are appointed. Today, I would like to highlight some of these crucial reforms.

First, our government introduced changes to promote diversity on the superior court bench. Ensuring our superior court judiciary reflects the diversity of Canadians is fundamental to a fair and effective justice system. When Canadians see themselves reflected in those who sit on the bench, their overall confidence in the administration of justice increases. The application form for superior court appointments was reworked to allow applicants to share their experiences, tell their stories and self-identify by gender; as indigenous, 2SLGBTQI+, racialized, a member of a cultural or ethnic group; and as living with a disability if they chose to do so.

Another one of our reforms was to reconstitute the judicial advisory committees, JACs, to be more reflective of the diversity of our local communities and to provide members with training on diversity, on conscious bias and assessment of merit. The JACs play an important role in the appointments process. They are responsible for considering applications, assessing each applicant as either

highly recommended, recommended or unable to recommend for appointment, and reporting their assessments to the Minister of Justice.

Another reform was with respect to the independence and effectiveness of the JACs. In addition to promoting diversity, the 2016 changes increased the independence and effectiveness of the JACs. We instituted an open selection process for the three JAC members who represent the general public, to give any member of the public the opportunity to express their interest in being involved, and to ensure that Canadians are properly represented in the appointment process.

The next reform is with respect to transparency and rigour. Our 2016 reforms to the superior court appointment process included measures to increase transparency. Since 2016, the commissioner for federal judicial affairs, which administers the appointment process, has collected and published statistics and demographic information on those who apply for judicial appointments and those who are appointed. This publicly accessible information, published on the commissioner's website, helps Canadians gain a better understanding of the makeup of our superior court judiciary, the work of the JACs and the number of highly qualified jurists who are motivated to serve their communities as judges.

In the 2022 reforms to the superior court appointment process, we made further changes to the process in response to comments we received from organizations such as the Canadian Judicial Council and the Canadian Bar Association. The application form was revised to ensure that the JACs received thorough, comprehensive and relevant information on candidates. The revised form also incorporated more respectful and inclusive language while continuing to give candidates the flexibility to highlight their experiences, including their interactions with their communities, and explain how their experiences have shaped them.

I am proud that since the reform process was implemented, more than half of the new judges appointed are women and the appointments broadly provide representation that is more in line with the diversity of Canadian society.

● (2005)

I would also emphasize that this government has, time and time again, demonstrated a meaningful commitment to access to justice by increasing the number of judges serving Canadians. Beginning in budget 2017, our government has funded 116 new judicial positions. Furthermore, most recently, in budget 2024, we have proposed that 17 judicial positions originally allocated to unified family courts in budget 2018 be repurposed to general trial courts. This would allow for a timely response to demonstrated current pressures on superior courts, including family matters.

Business of Supply

I fully appreciate the critical importance of filling vacancies, and I am committed and the minister is committed to continuing to do so as quickly as possible. Since November 2015, this government has made more than 730 judicial appointments. We are pleased that since his appointment in July 2023, this minister has announced over 100 appointments, as he mentioned earlier.

There will always be more steps to take and more improvements to make to ensure access to justice for Canadians. It takes the decisions and actions of a myriad of stakeholders who continually show their dedication to this laudable goal. I am deeply committed to continuing to do what I can to ensure a just and accessible justice system, since that is one of the reasons that I personally chose to enter public life. I know I share that sentiment with our Minister of Justice. I am proud that the federal government is doing its part as is unequivocally demonstrated by the minister's appointment record and by the government's support for new judicial resources in federal budgets.

To conclude, I will return to where I started. Our reformed superior court judicial appointments process has allowed us to continue to appoint outstanding jurists, members of a globally respected independent judiciary. Since implementing the major reforms to the appointments process, hundreds of outstanding jurists have been appointed to the superior courts across the country. They are respected in their communities and come from a broad range of backgrounds and practice areas. Every day, these exceptional judges are serving Canadians and fulfilling their unique and crucial role in our justice system. These judges were appointed through the reformed appointments process that serves Canadians well. It is a process that emphasizes transparency and merit, that reports on its progress and that works toward a bench that better reflects Canada's diversity.

Madam Chair, I am going to use the balance of my time to put a few questions to the minister, if I may. The first question is on an issue that comes up time and time again.

I mentioned earlier that I am proud of the fact that I practised in the courts of Ontario for a lengthy period of time. I am proud of the fact that we have one of the greatest judiciaries in the world. I have never been let down by our judiciary. By practising for so long and appearing in courtrooms in most cities in Ontario, I spent a lot of time asking questions. However, there is a question that I never once asked when I walked into a courtroom: Who appointed this judge? Do members know why? It is because it does not matter, because we have faith in our system and Canadians have faith in our system. Unfortunately, the Conservative opposition members, every opportunity they get, pose a question. They allude to the fact that our system is somehow tainted. They allude to the fact that our appointments process is inadequate. All that does is undermine the confidence Canadians have in our system when they have every reason to have total confidence in our system.

Is the fact that I never asked that question a reflection of our government's approach? The allegation that this government has any political input into the appointment of judges, in my opinion and in my experience, is absolutely and utterly false and I would like to hear the minister's views on this.

• (2010)

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Chair, let me be crystal clear to the parliamentary secretary, and I thank him for his work, that partisanship, donation history and political involvement have absolutely zero impact or role in the appointments process. When I am making a suggestion to pursue an appointment, there is no evidence that is put before me with respect to any donation history, political involvement or partisan activity.

I am pleased that this is a laughing matter for some of the lawyers opposite, but what I can say to these individuals is that 80% of the individuals who have actually been appointed, out of the 730 that we have appointed since 2015, have zero donation history of any kind. That is really critical to enhancing Canadians' confidence in the administration of justice in this country. I would say that I share that opinion.

I am actually delighted when I travel within this country, or even outside of this country, when people talk to me about the high quality of jurists that we have in Canada. We will continue to appoint jurists of the highest quality who have gone through that JAC process, who have come out as either recommended or highly recommended, because that preserves the integrity of the system and preserves Canadians' confidence in our judicial system. The fact that we are also, at the same time, reflecting the diversity of communities is an additional bonus. What I said earlier and will say again is that 50% of the appointments we have made are women. That is critical in terms of ensuring that all people see themselves reflected on the bench in Canada.

Mr. James Maloney: Madam Chair, I am going to go back to a topic I touched on earlier. It has to do with the judiciary, judicial vacancies and delays in our courtrooms.

As I said, I practised for a long time. I practised in Toronto, and there was a number of times I would have a trial ready to go in Newmarket, Oshawa or Brampton, only to be told there was no judge available or there was no courtroom available. In fact, there was a number of times I went to courts ready to start a trial, and they would say that there was a judge available, but there was no courtroom.

Canadians also need to understand that, when they walk into a courtroom and there is a superior court judge sitting there, the person who is sitting on the bench was appointed by the federal government. Every other component of the system, all of the infrastructure, is the responsibility of the provincial government: the desks, the chairs, all of the staff in that room, and the buildings, including the number of courtrooms in those buildings.

There are people who are in the trenches, and they know better. Conservative lawyers become Conservative politicians because they can make allegations without facts to support them. The fact of the matter is that the provincial governments are not committing the resources necessary to make sure that our judicial system functions at its maximum capacity. We have more judicial capacity in Canada right now than we have had at any time in my entire career, so I would like to hear more from the Minister of Justice on the complexity of the court system and the delays that are inherent in it because of these different factors.

Business of Supply

• (2015)

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I think there are a lot of issues here that we need to really understand.

First of all, I do make the appointments for the superior court-level judges around the country, at the superior courts, the courts of appeal and even, sometimes, the Supreme Court of Canada and the federal courts. The administration of justice, pursuant to our constitution, indicates that the administration of justice is the purview and constitutional responsibility of the provinces, so what the parliamentary secretary was indicating is exactly correct. That relates to the courthouses, the court personnel and even the Crown attorneys, and I do appreciate that there are Crown attorneys and former Crown attorneys in the room right now.

Their hiring, firing and promotion are all dictated by provincial edicts, provincial budgetary allotments, etc. That also applies to court clerks, court ushers, court translators and court personnel. All of those aspects relate to the administration of justice. That is the province's purview, not my purview.

That being said, I have a strong working relationship with various attorneys general right across the country. That is really important. We are constantly addressing some of their needs. Legal aid was raised by the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford. By supplying legal aid, we are ensuring that there are fewer unrepresented litigants in these courts. Unrepresented litigants take longer to move through the system because they do not have the benefit of counsel.

Second, I would raise, for the edification of the members opposite, that in this rush to pursue mandatory minimums, many of which have been found unconstitutional, we actually present an obstacle towards pursuing a path of potential trial resolution. If an accused individual knows that they will be facing a penalty no matter what, they are more likely to proceed all the way through to trial, which results in more delays and more backlogs.

There are a number of features here that we are trying to address. We are addressing all of them. I am certainly doing my part with judicial appointments, but we need to be working collaboratively with the Crown attorneys and the provinces in overall administration of the system.

Mr. James Maloney: Madam Chair, on the issue of the complexity of problems, I am going to go to auto theft.

The minister has been quite candid in acknowledging the fact that this is a serious problem. I find candour is a rare commodity in politics these days, so it is refreshing to see somebody who is willing to admit that there is a problem and that circumstances require a response, but one of the issues is auto theft. The minister spoke about this earlier. I am sure we will hear about it more tonight. One of the complexities is that it involves multiple levels of government and multiple parties.

Here is a fact: There are 800 fewer police officers in the streets in the GTA, where I come from, since 2015—

The Deputy Chair: I am sorry, but I have to allow the hon. minister time to respond.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, it is critical to be supporting local law enforcement, and what we are doing on auto theft is not only proposing amendments to how it is financed through the feds and through the budget, both of which the members opposite are opposing, but also funding law enforcement to the tune of \$121 million, which we announced on January 31. What that does is help in Ontario and Quebec with putting more officers on the ground, so they can deal with the pressing need to enhance law enforcement.

We are beefing up supports through the CBSA with \$28 million at the border. We are providing \$15 million for things like better Interpol information exchange. Through record investments of about \$170 million, plus dedicated changes to the legislation, we are tackling this issue. The number of intercepts is up. We are trying to bring the number of auto thefts down.

This is a comprehensive problem, and it requires a comprehensive solution. I would hope the members opposite would get on board with the legislation.

[Translation]

The Deputy Chair: Resuming debate.

The hon. member for Mégantic—L'Érable

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Madam Chair, I will be sharing my time with the members for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo and Calgary Forest Lawn.

The port of Montreal is the export hub for most stolen vehicles. According to the RCMP commissioner, “vehicle theft is reaching concerning volumes with a level of violence never seen in Canada”. The main reasons for that are the Prime Minister's incompetence and inability to take action to prevent auto theft

My question is this: How many violent car thieves have been given the maximum prison sentence by a court in 2024?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Chair, what I can tell the member from Quebec is that the export of stolen vehicles from the port of Montreal is indeed a problem that we need to solve. However, the resale of vehicles is also happening across the country.

We made investments in the port to resolve this problem and we are already seeing results. The CBSA intercepted over 1,000 vehicles at the port of Montreal.

• (2020)

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, I asked for a number. How many violent car thieves have been given the maximum prison sentence by a court in 2024? I want a number.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, those who resort to violence when stealing a vehicle will be subject to harsher sentences thanks to the changes that we—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, how many violent car thieves were given the maximum prison sentence by a court in 2023?

Business of Supply

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, from the situations that have been described to me by police officers in Quebec, we need to target the Criminal Code. We are making changes—

Mrs. Carol Hughes: The hon. member.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, I just want a number. How many car thieves who used violence were given the maximum prison sentence by a court in 2021? I just want a number.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the legislative changes we are making target those who use violence. This member has already said that he opposes changing the penalty for people who use violence—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, I will simplify my question. How many car thieves who used violence or car thieves in general were given the maximum prison sentence by a court since this Liberal Prime Minister was elected? I just want a number. How many received the maximum sentence?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, thanks to the investments we are making, according to the figures I have, 1,127 vehicles have been intercepted by the Canada Border Services Agency.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, I just want to be given a number. How many people have received a maximum sentence from a court? I will give the minister the answer. He knows full well that it is zero.

Can the minister tell us why the Prime Minister's grand plan is to increase maximum prison sentences to 14 years in prison when one has been given a maximum sentence in nine years?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I would like to clarify something to the member across the way. When we amend the Criminal Code to increase a maximum prison sentence we are sending a message to judges and the justice system that we very strongly condemn auto theft.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, can the minister tell us how many scanners could have been provided to the port of Montreal with the \$60 million that was wasted by the Canada Border Services Agency on ArriveCAN?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, what I can note is that the Canada Border Services Agency needs these investments to resolve the auto theft situation. With an investment of \$28 million—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, how many maximum sentences will the minister be able to hand out to car thieves in order to reduce the number of auto thefts in the coming years?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I have another figure for the member opposite. Since our investments in Ontario and Quebec, we have announced the recovery of more than 600 stolen vehicles this year.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, does the minister honestly believe that simply recovering stolen cars and not arresting the criminals will stop auto theft?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I believe that with tougher prison sentences and changes to the bail system, we are going to eliminate or limit the—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Luc Berthold: Madam Chair, the measure is completely useless because there has never been a case where a criminal was arrested and received a maximum sentence for car theft. How can the minister try to make people believe that his proposal will change anything about auto theft?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, it is rather strange because the position of the party opposite is to impose more penalties. We are targeting organized crime and violent crime. That is what we will continue to do.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Chair, when was the last time the minister visited bail court?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am seized with the fact that bail court has been an issue with respect to the need for reform—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Same question. When was the last time you went to bail court?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member has to address questions and comments through the Chair, not directly to the minister.

The hon. minister.

• (2025)

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I visit courthouses regularly in my functions as minister.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, during those visits to the courthouses, when was the last time the minister spent the day in bail court?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the important thing for me as minister is ensure that bail reform is being undertaken. That is—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, how about he just confirms that the answer is zero?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the member opposite is clearly not listening. I indicated that I go to courthouses around the country.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, how far is the closest courthouse to Parliament Hill?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the important piece about bail is ensuring that we are making bail changes to ensure that serious violent repeat offenders—

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, I have the same question. How far is the nearest courthouse to Parliament Hill?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I believe the nearest courthouse to Parliament Hill is the one on Elgin, opposite the Lord Elgin.

Business of Supply

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, has he attempted to visit that courthouse, which is 950 metres away, to observe bail hearings?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the closest courthouse to Parliament Hill is actually the Supreme Court.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, has he visited any courthouse here in Ottawa to observe the broken bail system that he and his Liberals have caused? Yes or no.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, bail reform is critical, and that is why we passed Bill C-48. That is why we are always looking to protect Canadians from serious violent repeat offenders.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Chair: Order. I am going to stop the clock for a second. I want to remind members that they have opportunities to ask questions. They have picked who will be asking the questions. I would ask them to allow their members to ask questions without disruption.

The hon. member.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, what is the closest courthouse to the minister's constituency office?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the closest courthouses to my constituency office are probably the ones in downtown Toronto.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, that is perhaps about six kilometres away, a short drive. Has he visited either of those to observe bail hearings?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I visit courthouses in my role as Minister of Justice, and I am seized with the issue of bail reform.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, I have the same question. Has the minister visited courthouses to observe bail hearings? Yes or no.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I work diligently on Criminal Code reform, including bail reform, to ensure to keep Canadians safe.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, what is it like to be the Minister of Justice and not know what is happening on the ground at bail court?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, in terms of bail reform, I have been working on that diligently since assuming the role—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, I am not talking about bail reform. I am talking about what happens in the day-to-day courts, not in the ivory towers, but on the ground.

What is it like to be in charge of that and not even go to see whether it is working?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, on bail reform, we passed Bill C-48 with the co-operation of that member opposite.

I would hope that with future Criminal Code reform, which would help keep Canadians safe, he would offer the same level of co-operation.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, if he wants to co-operate with Canadians, he will learn what is happening on the ground.

Why has the minister not gone to bail courts?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the member opposite is clearly not listening.

I indicated in my first response about eight minutes ago that I attend courthouses frequently in my role as minister.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, when was the last time the minister observed a bail hearing?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, on bail, I think the critical issue for us to understand is that we need to—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, I have the same question.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I think of deterrence, the likelihood of reoffending and the need to send a signal to the community.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, when was the last time the minister descended from the proverbial ivory tower and attended a bail hearing?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, just for the member's edification, my office is very similar to his. There is no ivory in it.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, when was the last time the minister attended a sentencing?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I attend courthouses around the country frequently in my capacity as minister, and I am invited to such courthouses.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, I ask the same question.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I give the same response.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, when was the last time the minister attended a sentencing?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I attend courthouses frequently in my capacity as the Attorney General and Minister of Justice.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Madam Chair, as the top legal official in this country, as Attorney General and Minister of Justice, does the minister not think he should attend a sentencing just once in a while?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I attend courthouses frequently. I do not attend active litigation, because my presence could be deemed a potential influencing factor on the litigation that is proceeding.

Business of Supply

• (2030)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Madam Chair, does the minister believe extortion is a problem in Canada, yes or no?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Chair, extortion is on the rise in Canada, and it needs to be addressed.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, the minister admits it is a problem. How many times was extortion mentioned in budget 2024? I would like just the number.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, with respect to my previous response to the member, who spent a long time in the Crown courts, I would indicate that—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, how many times is extortion mentioned in budget 2024? I would like just the number.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, my presence could be deemed to be potentially influencing the process, which is why I do not—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, it was mentioned zero times. Why?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I have indicated that extortion is an issue that needs to be addressed in Canada.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, has extortion gotten worse since 2015, yes or no?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the rise in extortion, largely due to organized criminality, has seen a recent increase.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, the minister said it is recent. How many extortion cases were there in 2021? I would like just the number.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, there were 7,671 charges completed for extortion—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, in 2021, how many extortion cases were there? I want just the number.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I have a statistic for the period from 2012 to 2021—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, there were 6,900.

How many extortion cases were there in 2022? I would like just the number.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, there were 7,671 charges over a period of nine years, 2012 to—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, there were 9,700 cases of extortion in 2022. That is a 40% increase.

Have they doubled since 2012, yes or no?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the number that I have, as I have indicated repeatedly, is 7,671 charges completed for extortion between 2012 and—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, the Liberal Bill C-5 made it easier for criminals to commit extortion with a gun. It makes it easier for them to get out of jail.

Have cases of extortion gone up since 2022, yes or no?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, as I have indicated, extortion is on the rise. We have a mandatory minimum penalty for a repeat offender who uses a weapon for extortion. We are ensuring that extortion is being taken seriously because it is on the rise.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, Bill C-5 took away mandatory minimums for criminals committing extortion with a gun. Why?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, there is a mandatory minimum penalty in place for people who use a restricted or prohibited firearm. The—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Minister, Bill C-5 repealed mandatory minimums for criminals committing extortion with a gun. Why?

The Deputy Chair: The member knows that he is to address questions and comments through the Chair.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the hon. member should know that is categorically incorrect, and I encourage him to read the Criminal Code. If someone commits an extortion with a prohibited firearm, that person is subject to a mandatory minimum.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, I will give the minister one more chance.

Bill C-5 repealed mandatory minimums for extortion with a gun. Why?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, there is a mandatory minimum penalty that is in place right now that was unchanged through Bill C-5. If someone does use—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, extortion cases have doubled since 2019. Is the minister proud of that?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, extortion is rising. We are seized of that matter and we are addressing it.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, does the minister think it was wise to make it easier to commit violent extortion with a gun?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, violent extortion that involves a prohibited firearm attracts a mandatory minimum penalty.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, the minister is incorrect. I will give him one more chance.

Does he think it was wise to make it easier for a criminal to commit extortion with a gun through a Bill C-5, yes or no?

Business of Supply

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I would encourage the member to read the Criminal Code. The mandatory minimum remains in place for extortion that is committed with violence with a restricted firearm.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, what about with non-restricted guns?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, extortion with a restricted firearm—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, now the truth comes out. The minister was misleading the entire time.

What about non-restricted guns?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, extortion is on the rise in Canada. We are treating extortion with the seriousness it deserves.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Madam Chair, we know it is on the rise since 2015 because of soft-on-bail policies. Does the minister think a four-year mandatory minimum is too long for a criminal who commits extortion with a gun, yes or no?

• (2035)

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the mandatory minimum penalty to which I am referring is actually larger than what the member just quoted. It is a seven-year mandatory minimum penalty, which is appropriate in those circumstances.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab (Halifax West, Lib.): Madam Chair, it is a pleasure to rise today in the chamber. I will be providing remarks and using the remainder of my minutes, after my remarks, with some questions for the minister.

I am pleased to speak this evening to an important keystone of access to justice, and that is legal aid. There are so many things one can speak on, but I have to limit what I can say here tonight in the minutes I have available.

While legal aid is not covered in the appropriations requested under the main estimates, budget 2024 includes measures to increase funding to criminal legal aid as well as legal aid for immigrants and refugees. It also includes new funding for impact of race and culture assessments. These proposed increases are contained within Bill C-69, the budget implementation act, which is now going through Parliament.

[*Translation*]

I want to give a short preamble to my comments on legal aid.

[*English*]

Our work on access to justice is aligned with broader Government of Canada work to achieve the sustainable development goals, including SDG 16, which speaks to a peaceful, just and inclusive society.

[*Translation*]

Our government is moving forward on this objective thanks to a person-centred approach. That means that we are focusing on the various needs of people with justice issues. The system must take into account people's situations.

[*English*]

This includes any history of victimization, mental health or substance use. In this vein, we are committed to addressing the root causes of crime, recognizing that this is the most effective way to build safer communities. Fair and equal access to justice also means ensuring respectful and timely processing without discrimination or bias.

We recognize that racism and systemic discrimination exist in our institutions. We know indigenous people, Black people and members of other racialized communities are grossly overrepresented in Canada's criminal justice system as both victims and offenders. In fact, we have heard plenty of testimony on that aspect at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

This brings me to the topic of legal aid.

[*Translation*]

A strong legal aid system is one of the pillars that advances access to justice in our justice system. However, not everyone has equal access to legal aid and representation. Lawyers are costly and the courtroom can be a confusing place.

[*English*]

Legal aid assists economically disadvantaged people in obtaining legal assistance and fair representation. We are committed, together with our provincial and territorial counterparts, to ensuring stable and predictable funding for legal aid so that Canadians can access justice.

Funding for criminal legal aid is marked as a decrease in the main estimates. While it is reflected as such, Bill C-69, and the justice minister addressed this in a previous question, proposes to renew this funding to provide \$440 million over five years starting in 2024-25. The renewed funds would support access to justice for Canadians who are unable to pay for legal support.

[*Translation*]

We know that would be particularly helpful for indigenous people, Black people, members of other racialized communities and people with mental health problems, who are all overrepresented in Canada's criminal justice system.

Business of Supply

● (2040)

[English]

As I mentioned, improving access to legal aid is possible only with continued collaboration between our governments, the provinces and the territories. The proposed renewed federal contribution will assist them in paving the way to greater access to justice, especially for vulnerable groups. We are also committed to ensuring the ongoing delivery of legal aid in immigration and refugee matters with eight provincial partners. That includes Nova Scotia.

[Translation]

The world is facing an unparalleled flow of migrants and refugees, and Canada is no exception. I have heard their stories, heard about the lives they left behind and heard about the challenges that they have to face in a new country, no matter how welcoming it may be, particularly when they have to deal with unfamiliar, complicated legal processes.

[English]

That is why our government is firmly committed to upholding a fair and compassionate refugee protection system. Part of this work is making sure that refugees have access to legal representation, information and advice. That is why budget 2024 proposes to provide \$273.7 million over five years, starting in 2024-25, and \$43.5 million ongoing to maintain federal support for immigration and refugee legal aid services in eight provinces where services are available. This includes an additional \$71.6 million this fiscal year.

The funding will improve access to justice for asylum seekers and others involved in certain immigration proceedings who may not have the means to hire legal representation. Immigration and refugee legal aid supports fair, effective and efficient decision-making on asylum and certain immigration claims by helping individuals present the relevant facts of their case in a clear and comprehensive manner.

To improve these specific legal aid services, Justice Canada works in tandem with provincial governments and legal aid service providers, as well as with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. We want to collectively ensure that we have stable and predictable ongoing funding for these important services.

Before I conclude, I also want to touch on another important item that would be supported by Bill C-69, impact of race and culture assessments, which would help the courts understand how racism and discrimination have contributed to a Black or racialized person's interactions with the criminal justice system. Budget 2024 proposes to provide an additional \$8 million over five years and \$1.6 million ongoing to expand these assessments in more jurisdictions.

On access to justice for all Canadians, we are committing to ensuring that the justice system is fairer for all. I will now continue with the time that I have left to pose a couple of questions to the minister.

My first question is going to centre on the online harms act, Bill C-63. I just want to preface it by saying that the online harms act is something that many of us are very concerned about these days. Obviously, we always were, but the concern is heightened. It is to

combat online hate, but it is also to protect our children from sexual exploitation and other harms. One cannot happen without the other.

Can the minister please comment on this, and, specifically, can he explain to Canadians and to the House why is it essential to raise Bill C-63 in the context of protecting our children?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Chair, by way of addressing a couple of points on extortion, what I would indicate for the benefit of the House is that we have announced an RCMP national coordination and support team to help coordinate investigations of extortion, and that extortion remains subject to a maximum life imprisonment penalty, which the Supreme Court has indicated demonstrates the seriousness of the offence.

With respect to the question about Bill C-63, I welcome this question. Keeping kids safe is everyone's responsibility in this chamber. This legislation, Bill C-63, would require a takedown within 24 hours of any material that constitutes child sex exploitative material. It would require a risk analysis and a risk reduction of material that induces a child to self-harm or bullies or intimidates a child. That is about doing right by people like Amanda Todd's mother and Rehtaeh Parsons' mother and so many kids who are being sextorted and exploited online.

● (2045)

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: Madam Chair, I want the minister to speak a little more on this specific topic. I actually received a number of communications in my constituency from parents and grandparents who are very concerned about their children and about the fact that they are so preoccupied these days with online platforms. In fact, my recollection is that the justice minister was at our Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, and he said that the most dangerous toys that Canadian families have are the screens their children use.

Can the minister explain that a little further and speak a little more about the measures in Bill C-63? I think that fundamentally it is a very alarming topic to many in my constituency and across the country.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, what I said at that committee, I will say again here: the Lego in my basement is subject to more restrictions than the screens my children are on. That has to change.

Business of Supply

We need to change the incentivization on social media companies from monetary incentivization to safety incentivization. This legislation would create a duty to protect children and a duty to remove content. I hope the opposition is listening. The prosecution would be facilitated, in terms of child sex predators, by making changes to the Mandatory Reporting Act, such that the evidence must be preserved for one year. Someone will have up to five years to lay a charge. All entities, including social media companies, must report, and they must report to a central clearing facility. That is critical to facilitating the prosecutions. That is what law enforcement has asked us for. That is what the mothers and fathers affected by things like sextortion around this country have asked us for. That is what will help keep kids from being induced to self-harm, which includes, sadly and tragically, suicide in the case of Carson Cleland in Prince George, B.C., and so many other children around this country.

What we understand from the Centre for Child Protection is that 70 times per week they get notifications of sextortion, and that is only the kids who are coming forward. It is critical to address this issue with haste. We need to pass Bill C-63 at second reading and get it to committee to hear from experts about the pressing need for this bill.

Ms. Lena Metlege Diab: Madam Chair, hate is on the rise in Canada. In fact, at our committee right now, we are studying anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. We could study anti anything these days.

I believe there is so much going on in the world that people just want to express their anger, and there is a lot happening. It is alarming, and it is distressing to hear numerous accounts of hatred against people in our public forum. I firmly believe that hatred should have no place in Canada, but we do know that it exists. All people should feel and must feel safe to express themselves online and off-line. We know that is not the case.

I want to ask the Minister of Justice to please discuss this and to elaborate a bit further on what we can do to keep people safe from hatred.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I would say that we can start by moving with pace on Bill C-63. It talks about the fact that hate crimes are up 130% over the last five years in this country. We know that the hatred people are exposed to online has real-world consequences. Look no further than the trials of the individuals who were killed at the Quebec City mosque and the trials of the Afzaal family, who were killed in London, Ontario.

How do we cure this? We take a Supreme Court definition of hatred and entrench it in law. That is something that law enforcement has asked us for. Again, I hope the members opposite are listening. Law enforcement and police officers have asked us for these changes because they want to facilitate the work of their hate crimes units in identifying what is happening and laying charges for what is happening. By enhancing penalties under the Criminal Code, by entrenching a definition of hatred in the Canadian Human Rights Act that facilitates discrimination complaints for online hate speech and by ensuring that we are having this content addressed by social media platforms, we can address this at multiple angles.

This is critical toward keeping people safe, now more than ever, when hatred is on the rise, whether it is the anti-Semitism the member just spoke about, whether it is the Islamophobia we have seen with such fatal consequences, whether it is attacks towards the LGBTQ2 community or whether it is attacks against indigenous people in the Prairies. This is rife right now. The time to act is now, not at some future date, to keep Canadians safe. This must to be a priority for every parliamentarian here. Does that mean that we have the perfect bill? Absolutely, it does not mean that. I am open to amendments. We need to get this bill to the justice committee so that we can hear from experts about how a good bill can be strengthened further.

• (2050)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Madam Chair, on what date did the minister say, “empirically it’s unlikely” that Canada is less safe?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Chair, the safety of Canadians is my fundamental priority. I have indicated that I have been briefed on the matter, and I understand that violent crime is up in Canada.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, I should also say that I will be splitting my time with the member for Durham. I will be taking 10 minutes.

I will ask this one more time to the minister: On what date did he say publicly that “empirically it’s unlikely” that Canada is less safe?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the issue of safety is a priority for me, and I hope it is a priority for the members opposite. I am troubled by their opposition to basic premises, such as Bill C-21, which is about reducing the number of handguns in Canadian society and keeping women, like the member opposite—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, just for fun, I will ask one more time. On what date did the Minister of Justice publicly say that “empirically it’s unlikely” that Canada is less safe? These are his words. On what day did he say it?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, keeping Canadians safe is a priority of mine. That is why we are addressing things like gun violence. I was a bit shocked during the supplementary estimates vote when that member voted against \$83 million of funding, which would have helped with guns and gangs.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, it was the Minister of Justice for Canada, and he actually said that on July 31, 2023.

How many Ontario municipalities have declared intimate partner violence an epidemic?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I have declared intimate partner violence an epidemic, and I was quite clear in doing so in response to the Renfrew County inquest.

Business of Supply

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, how many Ontario municipalities have declared intimate partner violence an epidemic?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, intimate partner violence is a critical crisis situation. It is an epidemic not just in Ontario, but also around the country. That is why we are targeting it through measures that relate to—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, is it not interesting that the minister says that, yet he also said that it is empirically unlikely that Canada is less safe? It is 94 municipalities.

In Ontario, how many women were killed in a 30-week window between 2022 and 2023?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I am encouraged by the member's passion for addressing domestic violence; it's got to be a passionate priority for all of us. I am discouraged by the fact that when we introduced legislation that would have things like a red flag law to take a gun away from an abusive spouse, the member voted against it.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, it is very interesting that the minister brings up guns and does not want to answer the question. There was a man who killed a woman in front of a Calgary elementary school. He was under a no-contact order. What did he murder her with?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, the weapons that are being used in terms of violence against women include guns. That is what we have heard at committee. That is why we implemented legislation to freeze handgun sales and to regulate the fact that red flag laws—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, the man who took the woman's life in front of her children in an elementary schoolyard was previously charged with domestic violence offences, released under a no-contact order and had active warrants against him. The minister wants to bring up guns.

I will ask again: How was the woman murdered by a repeat offender who was out on warrants?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I would say again, because this is an issue that needs to be addressed, that guns and gangs relate to keeping people safe. When that member and her party vote against funding for guns and gangs, they are not keeping Canadians safe, nor Canadian women.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, the man was first charged with a domestic violence offence in July 2023. He was released on bail on the condition that he have no contact with his estranged wife. He was charged with violating that release condition in September and again in November. He stabbed her. This is appalling to hear from the Minister of Justice when victims are watching.

I go to the Minister to say this. This is a letter from the friends of Kristen French, who was murdered by Paul Bernardo. It states:

Once again we are saddened and disappointed that the Government of Canada has added to the continued emotional trauma and victimization of the many people who have been affected by this man and his brutal crimes. To know that so much communication took place about the transfer and yet no one deemed it important enough to ensure that the minister was addressed personally speaks yet again to the disregard of victims in our Criminal Justice System.

Since the minister did not make any public statement last week, which was Victims and Survivors of Crime Week, why has he not followed through on the Liberals' promise to review the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights?

● (2055)

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I work in close collaboration with the Ombudsperson for victims and with victims groups around the country. I would say to the victims, including the French family, that my heart feels for them and for the loss they have experienced at the hands of a very heinous killer. That crime affected the entire nation and continues to affect the entire nation.

I would also reiterate for the member opposite that decisions about parole and corrections and release are obviously governed at arm's length by the Parole Board of Canada and are also under the domain of the Minister of Public Safety.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, how many years ago did he promise to enforce and to review the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, with respect to victims services and victims needs, we are attentive to them and are constantly prioritizing them, and that is—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, in 2020 that was promised, and it has never been done. There is no authority specifically dedicated to ensuring the implementation of the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights. Victims must rely on the Office of the Federal Ombudsperson for Victims of Crime.

Does he think that is fair for victims?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, my opinion of victims is demonstrated through the prioritization of legislation we put through the House. I would include, in that regard, the sex offender registry, which was struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada. We worked with Pace successfully through the House and through the Senate to reinstall the sex offender registry to keep women in particular safe from—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, they were called to do a review in 2020 on behalf of victims everywhere. What a shameful representation from the Minister of Justice that this Canadian Victims Bill of Rights has never been reviewed. I ask the minister today, he is the Minister of Justice, to name the four issues that have been asked to be reviewed, because in this country, criminals have more rights than victims. What are they? Please tell the victims watching.

Business of Supply

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, what I would say to these questions is that I am encouraged by the member's passion in the defence of victims, including women who are victims of violence. What I would hope is that her leader would demonstrate the same commitment toward women's rights generally, including women's rights—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, it is absolutely desperate and pathetic, and that is a shameful response.

This is my last question. The minister says he is so concerned about Bill C-63, which he is in charge of bringing forward to the House. If it so important to protect children, why has he not done it?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I reject categorically the accusation that raising the issue of a woman's right to choose, a woman's control over her reproductive rights, is something that should be the subject of scorn by any member of Parliament. These are constitutionally protected rights that are protected by section 7, which is one of the provisions that is subject to the notwithstanding clause her leader is—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, we have an increase of 815% under this minister's watch involving online sexual luring. He is trying to distract. He does not want to answer the questions. He is the one who brought up his proverbial Bill C-63 that is going to solve all these problems. He said Canada is not unsafe, yet we have stats that show an increase of 101% increase in gun crime.

Why, if Bill C-63 is so important and he is so worried about public safety and so worried about victims, has he not brought it forward to the House?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, we have tabled that legislation. We are looking forward to having it voted on in the House and proceeding to committee as fast as possible because the luring she mentioned is child predation. It is something that she and I hopefully can agree that we need to cure. That is one of the things that would be tackled through this legislation, among other things.

She has been spending a lot of time talking about women's rights. Women who are covered through revenge porn would also be addressed through Bill C-63 because it is a second form of content that would be subject to a 24-hour takedown requirement. Surely we can agree on the necessity of prioritizing—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, I will ask, right now, for the minister to redeem himself just a tiny bit and to give a date when he will review the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights so that victims' rights are actually enforced in Canada. What is the date, please?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, we are constantly working to ensure the rights of victims, including female victims, are entrenched in law in Canada. That is why Bill C-21 included red flag laws. That is why we established the sex offender registry. That is why I have worked on two occasions to ensure there is a reverse—

• (2100)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Madam Chair, the Liberals promised to review the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights, which was created by former prime minister Stephen Harper. They have never done this. Victims deserve a date, and they deserve it right now. When will it be reviewed, and when will victims come first in Canada?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, our commitment to victims, including victims of intimate partner violence, is steadfast, and that is witnessed through our reforms in Bill C-48 and Bill C-75, which dealt with the reverse onus on bail for people who are victims of intimate partner violence. That is demonstrating our commitment to victims, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Jamil Jivani (Durham, CPC): Madam Chair, I would like to have a straight-up conversation about some facts. Is the minister aware of the tragic car crash that occurred on Highway 401 in Durham region on April 29?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Chair, I am aware of the traffic fatalities as a general proposition.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Madam Chair, I will inform him that the Highway 401 car crash made national news because four people were killed, including an infant.

Does the minister know that the robbery suspect who caused that car crash was out on bail after being arrested for similar crimes in the past?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, what I would emphasize is that bail is governed by certain fundamental precepts that are in the Criminal Code of Canada. It is about ensuring that people are not a flight risk or likely to repeat an offence. It is also demonstrating the community's denunciation.

In Ontario, individual bail determinations are mainly made by justices of the peace.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Madam Chair, is the justice minister aware of the community safety alert issued by the Durham Regional Police on May 10 concerning a high-risk sex offender?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, high-risk sex offenders are obviously a priority of ours. I indicated that we re-established the sex offender registry through the swift passage of Bill S-12.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Madam Chair, the community safety alert was issued by the Durham police because this high-risk sex offender poses a serious danger to children.

Is the minister aware that the offender was arrested for previous crimes in the past and then released on bail?

Business of Supply

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, as a point of clarification, the Victims Bill of Rights was reviewed by the justice committee last year. With respect to decisions about individual cases of bail, those are made by independent and impartial justices of the peace in Ontario.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Madam Chair, does the justice minister recognize the name of a 27-year-old Toronto man, Edwin John Redmond?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, what I can further indicate with respect to bail decisions is that the Criminal Code provides that one can bring a review application for a bail decision—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Madam Chair, Mr. Redmond was very sadly and tragically beaten to death in Toronto, not far from the minister's home constituency, three months ago.

Does the minister know that Mr. Redmond's attackers were previously arrested for similar crimes and then released on bail?

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I appreciate that the member opposite is new to the House and I welcome him.

What I would indicate to him is that we have been spending some time talking about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I would encourage him to look at the fact that constitutional protections apply to bail and are entrenched in section 11(e) of the charter.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Madam Chair, the condescending tone from the minister, just because I have not been here for very long, does not mean that I do not know what I am talking about.

In fact, with these cases in mind, I would like to know if the justice minister is willing to humbly acknowledge that Liberal bail policies are enabling repeat offenders to commit more crimes.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, again, for his edification, I would point the member toward Bill C-48, which may have been passed before he arrived. It talked about serious, violent, repeat offenders being subjected to a reverse onus, so instead of being presumed to receive bail, they are presumed not to receive bail and have to convince a justice of the peace otherwise.

The Deputy Chair: Order. I have a point of order from the hon. deputy government House leader.

• (2105)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Madam Chair, on this side of the House we are being very quiet and letting the questions be answered, yet the minister is continually being heckled when he is trying to provide answers. Perhaps you could encourage the members on the other side, including the former Speaker of the House of Commons, to use better judgment and instead of lashing out, listen to what the minister has to say.

An hon. member: If anyone knows—

The Deputy Chair: Order.

I have already raised this point on a number of occasions. The hon. members lose time every time I have to call a point of order. I would ask members to please be respectful. If they wish to add something, they can get up and speak at their appropriate time.

The hon. member for Durham.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Madam Chair, on numerous occasions the justice minister has made reference to me as the newest MP here.

His government has been in power for nine years, and in those nine years, people's lives have gotten harder, criminals have been allowed to get in and out of courthouses like a turnstile and the minister is continuously putting communities at risk. You have had nine years, and look at what has happened.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member knows full well that he is to address all questions and comments through the Chair.

The hon. minister.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I would indicate to the member opposite that persons who are released on bail through an independent decision made by a justice of the peace in Ontario are often subject to conditions of release that are tailored to their specific situation. Always, the key concerns are deterring a repeat offence, ensuring that we are sending a message, and ensuring that there is not a flight risk.

Mr. Jamil Jivani: Madam Chair, the justice minister clearly needs to humble himself, admit the Liberal government's mistakes, stop allowing repeat offenders back on the street, and actually keep our neighbourhoods and our communities safe.

Hon. Arif Virani: Madam Chair, I would reiterate for the member's edification that I do not make individual bail decisions in a country like ours and in a democracy like ours. Those are made by justices of the peace or judges around the country.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member had opportunities to ask questions. He should wait for the answer and not interrupt.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Chair, I appreciate the opportunity this evening to speak on an issue of major concern to the residents of Canada: the threats of organized crime and money laundering and the measures that the Government of Canada is taking to respond to these serious problems.

Specifically, I am going to share with everyone how the government proposes to strengthen the robust framework that is in place in the Criminal Code to address these serious crimes. The government has been listening to the concerns of communities in Canada and is acting to ensure that law enforcement and prosecutors have the laws and tools they need to combat these serious crimes.

Organized criminal groups are increasingly sophisticated and mobile. Their activities extend beyond the illegal drug trade to include the trafficking of human beings, cross-border smuggling, counterfeit goods, natural resource crimes and money laundering.

Business of Supply

As we have seen in recent years, organized crime has also expanded its focus to auto theft. Organized crime has devastating impacts on our health, safety and economic security. These impacts include the harms of substance use and the tragedy associated with overdose; the loss of financial security due to crimes such as auto theft and frauds; and the erosion of our communities' sense of safety and security.

However, I am pleased to speak today about some of the considerable tools that police and prosecutors have to assist them in the investigation and prosecution of organized crime offences and money laundering. The Criminal Code defines a criminal organization broadly. It refers to “a group, however organized...of three or more persons in or outside Canada” that “has as one of its main purposes or main activities” to commit or facilitate a serious offence that would “result in...a material benefit” for anyone in the group.

A serious offence is one that is punishable by at least five years' imprisonment or that is otherwise prescribed by regulation. As well, there are four specific criminal organization offences in the Criminal Code. These consist of participating in the activities of a criminal organization, recruiting members for a criminal organization, committing an indictable offence for a criminal organization and instructing the commission of an offence for a criminal organization. These offences are punishable by significant penalties, including up to life imprisonment for instructing the commission of an offence for a criminal organization.

The involvement of organized crime in an offence has further implications under the Criminal Code, both prior to a trial and following a conviction. These include the availability of enhanced tools to enable police to investigate offences involving organized crime. They also include the requirement for a person charged with an offence involving organized crime to justify why their release from custody pending trial is, in fact, warranted.

There are significant implications for an offender who is convicted of a criminal organization offence. They include that the courts must consider, as an aggravating factor for sentencing, that a crime was committed for the benefit of a criminal organization. All murders connected to an organized crime are automatically treated as first-degree murder, regardless of whether or not they were planned and deliberate. There are increased maximum and mandatory minimum penalties of imprisonment for certain offences committed in connection with organized crime, and the offender may face forfeiture of the proceeds of their crime unless they can demonstrate that the property was not obtained or derived from organized crime activity.

Although the Criminal Code has a comprehensive framework to address organized crime in all its forms, the government has in recent months considered how best to update our criminal law as organized crime shifts its strategies. That is why I am pleased to outline the measures included in Bill C-69, the budget implementation act.

● (2110)

To respond to the rise in motor vehicle theft, particularly where violence and organized crime are involved, the proposed amendments include the following: new offences targeting auto theft and

its links to violence and organized crime, which would carry a maximum penalty of 14 years of imprisonment; new offences for possession and distribution of a device suitable for committing auto theft, which would carry a maximum penalty of 10 years of imprisonment; a new aggravating factor at sentencing if an offender involved a young person in committing a crime; and, lastly, a new offence for laundering proceeds of crime for the benefit of a criminal organization, which would carry a maximum penalty of 14 years of imprisonment.

However, this is not all the government has been doing to provide law enforcement and prosecutors with tools in the Criminal Code to respond to the serious crimes of money laundering and terrorist financing. In recent years, the Government of Canada has introduced legislative reforms to the Proceeds of Crime (Money Laundering) and Terrorist Financing Act, the Income Tax Act and the Criminal Code to better respond to money laundering and terrorist financing.

Having said all that, I have a question for the minister with respect to the notwithstanding clause.

We have often heard from the leader of the new Reform Party across the way about the notwithstanding clause. However, zero is the number of times that any federal government from any party has ever used the notwithstanding clause, as this would negate enshrined freedoms of Canadians. Furthermore, it has only rarely been used by provinces. However, two weeks ago, the Leader of the Opposition, the new Reform Party, said that he would trample on our charter and use the notwithstanding clause to knowingly violate Canadians' rights. This is very serious.

Can the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada talk to this chamber about the notwithstanding clause and why it should not be used to attack the rights and freedoms of Canadians as proposed by the Leader of the Opposition, the new Reform Party?

● (2115)

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Chair, I want to make two clarifications. The study on the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights generated a report from the committee on December 7 of last year. In addition, what the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo was asking was quite troubling, because the notion that a sitting attorney general would appear in live court during the middle of a criminal proceeding would, in my view, raise a very significant concern about undue influence and possibly efforts to influence the outcome of a proceeding. That would be entirely untoward and inappropriate.

Business of Supply

With respect to the question presented by the member for Niagara, what is troubling about even floating the idea of invocation of the notwithstanding clause is that it presents a spectre where the charter and the rights and freedoms contained therein are an inconvenience that needs to be overcome. The fact that they would be cavalierly overcome by a man who is the leader of the official opposition, who would purportedly claim the role of prime minister one day, is very troubling. It would set a precedent, as it has never been done in the history of this country. It would also demonstrate a real disregard for the important interests that Canadians have in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms itself.

Why do I say that? It is because the charter protects fundamental things, such as the free expressive rights that we have been talking about in the context of the online safety bill, which are protected under section 2B; freedom of religion, which is so precious at stake right now when we are dealing with so much troubling anti-Semitism; the ability to peacefully assemble, which is protected under section 2 of the charter; and our rights to equality and our rights to basic presumptions of innocence.

If the Leader of the Opposition would so cavalierly use the notwithstanding clause to trump basic presumptions about innocence, it raises a lot of questions for Canadians, including those who are watching right now: In what other ways would he use it? Section 7 protects a woman's right to have an abortion in this country. Section 15 protects such things as equality rights in terms of gay marriage. Would he use it in those regards? I do not know the answer to these questions. However, as Minister of Justice and as guardian of the Constitution and the rights and freedoms contained therein, I am very troubled.

Our position as a government, our position as a party, is clear. We created the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and we stand by it; that means every right and freedom contained therein. Canadians need to know what we stand for and what the official opposition stands for.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Madam Chair, one of the limits on access to justice is that many people do not know that there is a wrongful convictions review process in the first place. Often they do not have the resources to apply in the current process. Can the minister please discuss the proactive outreach measures in Bill C-40 to help ensure that those in need can in fact apply?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-40 represents a staggering change in the way we envisage wrongful convictions in this country. It would provide a new mechanism, a review commission, which would have the tools and resources to go out and find the cases. In the same time period, in the U.K., within a 20-year time frame, about 500 cases were unearthed that dealt with wrongful convictions. In the same time period in Canada, 27 cases were found.

I know the member to be a strong advocate of the indigenous community in this country. Among those 27 cases in Canada, five involved Black or indigenous men. Given the severe overrepresentation of Black and indigenous people in our justice system, that is a completely disproportionate statistic that is statistically improbable. Does it mean that, in the U.K., they are wrongfully convicting more people than we are in Canada? No, I think it means that we are not finding the cases here in Canada.

The bill, unfortunately, was obstructed at the justice committee, but it has now finally left the justice committee. Through it, we have the ability to make a fundamental change in how we deal with wrongful convictions in this country, providing the resources and the outreach capability to find the cases and bring innocent men and women to justice in this country, something that is long overdue.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Mr. Speaker, as members of Parliament, we were all elected by Canadians with the duty to improve their lives and make Canada a better and safer place. The issue of auto theft should not be partisan; at the end of the day, we are all here with a genuine wish to bring these crimes to an end. One way to do this is through collaboration. As we have seen, the federal government stood on Monday alongside police forces and municipalities.

Can the minister share with us his thoughts on the importance of cross-partisan collaboration, in order to put an end to auto theft crimes?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely can. I will say that cross-party collaboration is happening, at least, between the federal and the provincial governments, with my counterparts in Ontario and Quebec, where I have a strong collaborative relationship with Attorney General Doug Downey. What we have said is that we need to be working together. That is why we are investing in law enforcement, which assists the province.

That is why we are making changes to the Criminal Code. What are those changes? We are introducing an aggravating factor where, if an adult organized criminal is using a child or an adolescent, we will ensure that they are subject to a tougher penalty. We are ensuring that if one does a carjacking, a violent car theft in broad daylight, one is subject to a tougher penalty of up to 14 years. If there are threats of violence or the involvement of organized criminality, that will trigger differential penalties.

In addition, the possession and distribution of the device that is used, the key fob theft devices, etc., will trigger additional penalties. These points are critical for tackling the pressing issue of auto theft. They have been welcomed by the law enforcement community and partisan people of every political stripe around this country at multiple levels. The only people who do not seem to be welcoming and embracing these changes are those in the official opposition, and it leads me to wonder why.

• (2120)

Mr. Vance Badawey: Mr. Speaker, this is something that I have been hearing a lot about, especially of late, in particular as it relates to some of the agendas, mostly political. With that, certain individuals seem to be fanning the flames of hate to further their own agendas.

Hate is on the rise in Canada. It is alarming and distressing to hear numerous accounts of hatred against people in our public forum, for example. This includes a rise in both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Hatred has no place in this country, in Canada. All people must feel safe to express themselves, whether it be online or off-line.

Business of Supply

Can the Minister of Justice please discuss how the online harms act would help keep us safe from hatred?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, it would do so by entrenching a definition of hatred that has already been upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada; by ensuring that hatred is identified and one's exposure to it is reduced via putting a responsibility on platforms; by ensuring that one can complain to the Canadian Human Rights Commission if one believes that one is the target of online hate speech; and by ensuring that the penalties for hatred, including the anti-Semitism and Islamophobia that were just mentioned by the member, are addressed with more significant penalties on summary conviction and on indictable offences. We have a scourge of hatred in this country, and we have to address it. That is what the bill would do.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time three ways, with the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent, followed by the member for Langley—Aldergrove.

The RCMP carried out a criminal investigation into whether the Prime Minister obstructed justice when he fired Jody Wilson-Raybould as his attorney general during the SNC-Lavalin scandal. At committee, the RCMP confirmed that this investigation was thwarted after the Prime Minister hid behind cabinet confidence, refusing to turn over documents that were requested by the RCMP.

Can the minister confirm whether the Prime Minister will finally end the obstruction and turn over the documents so that the RCMP can complete its investigation?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would indicate to the member opposite that the investigations into this matter, or any other matter by the RCMP, are handled independently in a democracy such as ours, by the RCMP themselves. It would be untoward for me to be commenting on the nature of that prosecution or its direction.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the RCMP investigation report states that the strongest theory toward obstruction of justice rests on whether the Prime Minister fired Jody Wilson-Raybould so that a new attorney general would make a different decision with respect to the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin.

Again, if the Prime Minister has nothing to hide, if he is in fact not guilty of obstructing justice, then why will he not waive cabinet confidence and turn over the documents to the RCMP?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, after assuming this role, I would indicate that the important division and distinction made with respect to prosecutions through the Director of Public Prosecutions Act and through the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has never been more apparent to me. I will give credit where credit is due. That is actually a creation of the Harper government, I believe, circa 2006-07. That is an important feature of our constitutional democracy. It needs to be safeguarded, and it is being safeguarded.

Decisions about prosecutions are made independently of me in this democracy, and that is a good thing. In fact, it is something that the Malaysian government has actually sought to study, in terms of the model that we use here in Canada. The Malaysian government has sent visitations to me, to learn about our model.

• (2125)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, correct me if I am wrong, but the questions that are posed tonight are supposed to be with respect to the estimates. Is that correct? If so, the last line of questioning has significantly deviated from that.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, I have three observations.

First, members have wide ambit during estimates in the questions posed to the minister. That has been respected this evening until I posed a question relating to the Prime Minister's potential criminality that irked the member for Kingston and the Islands.

Second, the order in council with respect to cabinet confidence indicated that the RCMP went to the Department of Justice first to ask that the order in council and its scope be extended.

Third, the matter of the SNC-Lavalin scandal, and what followed, arises from a decision of the director of public prosecutions that is housed within the minister's department.

The Speaker: As mentioned, all hon. members have a wide ambit in terms of posing questions, and the questions are relevant to the Minister of Justice.

The hon. member for St. Albert—Edmonton has the floor for the next question.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, the very evidence that the Prime Minister has withheld from the RCMP goes to the heart of whether the Prime Minister committed a crime, whether he obstructed justice and whether he fired Jody Wilson-Raybould so that a new attorney general would make a different decision with respect to the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin. The Prime Minister can waive cabinet confidence tonight.

Again, if the Prime Minister has nothing to hide, then why has the cover-up continued?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, what I would respectfully point out to the member opposite is the fact that an investigation was launched by the RCMP. It was not directed by any member on this side of the House, or any member of the House, which is as it needs to be. The fact that the investigation has run its course demonstrates that there is no involvement by the Prime Minister, the Government of Canada or my office, as there needs not to be. That is fundamental to the way our democracy operates.

I would just reiterate that the distinction bears its hallmarks in legislation that was actually introduced by the member opposite's party.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Speaker, first, paragraph 23 of the RCMP investigation report states that it should be emphasized that the conclusions reached in the report do not translate to the absence of a criminal offence. In other words, the Prime Minister has not been cleared by the RCMP.

Second, paragraph 24 of the report says that if there is additional evidence, the RCMP will reopen the investigation. The reason the RCMP had to close the investigation is that the Prime Minister is hiding behind cabinet documents that go to the heart of whether he obstructed justice.

Business of Supply

Is not the real reason the Prime Minister continues to hide behind cabinet confidence that he obstructed justice? He fired Jody Wilson-Raybould because she stood up to his corrupt demands that she interfere in the prosecution of SNC-Lavalin. Is that not what happened?

The Speaker: The time has elapsed for the hon. member's question, but I will invite the minister to provide a very brief response.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, what I would reiterate is that the RCMP, when it makes a decision to open an investigation or conclude an investigation, which may or may not result in an act of prosecution, that is an independent decision.

That is important to support in our democracy, and we will always continue to do so.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Langley—Aldergrove.

Two months ago, a legal saga ended when former justice Jacques Delisle admitted his guilt in the 2009 murder of his wife.

Does the minister know what action his predecessor, the Hon. David Lametti, took in this case?

• (2130)

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Delisle case in Quebec highlights the importance of changing our system regarding the way investigations are conducted following a bad conviction. That is why we must promote Bill C-40, in order to change our system and discover more cases that are at issue, such as that of Mr. Delisle.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, what was it that led the former minister of justice, Mr. Lametti, to order another trial? Can the minister answer me?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, what I can say is that it is not up to the minister to decide the guilt or innocence of someone who—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, the minister referred to a miscarriage of justice.

Does the current minister respect Canada's Criminal Conviction Review Group, yes or no?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, under the current process, the minister relies on a recommendation from the Criminal Conviction Review Group. That is the system we have now.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, the Criminal Conviction Review Group did not find that any miscarriages of justice had occurred. However, Minister Lametti ordered another trial, citing a miscarriage of justice.

Does the minister believe that Minister Lametti did the right thing, yes or no?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, it may be up to the minister to refer a case, but it is up to a new court to decide whether a person is guilty or not. It is not up to the minister to make the final decision. The decision—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, did Minister Lametti seek other opinions to determine whether he was going to make his decision, apart from that of the Criminal Conviction Review Group?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, with regard to the process followed, it was the existing group that was involved—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, he asked for two independent opinions.

Has the minister read these opinions?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, once again, as I see it, the Delisle case underscores the importance of changing the process to look for more—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, does the current minister want the two opinions that Minister Lametti solicited to be made public, yes or no?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Delisle's situation highlights the fact that we need to change the process and avoid—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, is the minister aware that the fact that Minister Lametti was asked for two opinions and he never made them public has undermined the credibility of the justice system? Is he aware of that?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, the situation we are talking about right now, like any other situation, includes private details that are still confidential and protected by the—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, does the minister know who the director of criminal and penal prosecutions, or DCPP, in Quebec is? Does he know who that is?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, we follow the guidelines that fall under our jurisdiction at the federal level when it comes to a miscarriage of justice such as this.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, the director of criminal and penal prosecutions spoke out about Mr. Lametti's action, saying that he and his staff did not even know these opinions existed and that this does not help them understand. On the contrary, it makes the minister's decision to order a new trial even harder to understand.

Does the minister agree with Mr. Michel?

Business of Supply

The Speaker: Before the minister answers the question, I would like to make sure that everyone waits until they are recognized by the Chair before speaking.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I want to note that it is up to a minister, whether that is me or my predecessor, to make the decision to refer a case. Nonetheless, the final decision is always made by a court, whether it is a lower court or a court of appeal.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, Patrick Michel said that Minister Lametti's decision "not only discredits the administration of justice, it also discredits the review process for wrongful convictions".

Is the minister proud of his predecessor?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Lametti, whom I worked with as parliamentary secretary, did extraordinary work during his more than four years in the position. I can note that the context we are discussing now illustrates the need to completely change the process with Bill C-40—

• (2135)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Mr. Speaker, is the minister aware that the issue is not about processes, but the actions of his predecessor, Mr. Lametti, who tossed out the CCRG's report?

Is he aware of the fact that he went against what the CCRG was saying?

The Speaker: The member's time is up, unfortunately, but I will allow the minister 10 seconds to answer.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, the current process is one we have been using for a number of years. We want to change it with a commission independent of the government—

[*English*]

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been reported in the city of Victoria that the same man has been arrested three times in three days for auto theft. Where was he today? He was out on bail again, so it is catch and release three times, and the people of Victoria are wondering why the police are not doing their work.

My question for the minister is this: How many times is enough before a dangerous repeat offender like this auto thief should be restrained for the sake of public safety?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I would say to the member opposite is that as a person who is concerned with the safety of Canadians, obviously I share his concern.

When I outlined earlier the fact that, when dealing with bail, we need to look at flight risk, maintaining confidence in the administration of justice, and protection of the safety of the public, one would genuinely question whether the decisions being rendered by a justice of the peace or a local provincial court justice are accurate in that regard. There is recourse for reviewing a bail decision, and I would urge the residents of Victoria to pursue that recourse.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Mr. Speaker, there was another story also coming out of the city of Victoria that a person charged with illicit

drug trafficking three times was released on bail three times, and people are wondering what is going on with the police. Now the police, in their public notices, have taken to highlighting Bill C-75 of the Liberal government, which directs them to release people with the least restraint possible.

My question to the minister again is this: How many times is too many before a repeat violent offender like the drug trafficker I mentioned should be kept behind bars for the sake of public safety?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's contributions at the justice committee and to today's debate, but let me just outline a few things. The first is that I am not responsible, or the decision-maker, for individual bail decisions. Those are made by independent and impartial adjudicators around the country. Second, the decisions are meant to be guided by principles under the Criminal Code of Canada and by Supreme Court jurisprudence.

The member is referencing Bill C-75, and what it entrenched is the constitutional principle that already came from case law, such as the Antic decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. All we were doing was codifying a jurisprudential decision that had already been made. However, in terms of decisions that are being made about repeat offenders, that goes to the hallmark of the likelihood of reoffending. That is a consideration for bail under the Criminal Code of Canada. It needs to be applied in all instances.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Mr. Speaker, Constable Shaelyn Yang of the Burnaby RCMP was murdered in October 2022, about 18 months ago. She was stabbed to death by a drug-crazed person when she was doing a wellness check at a homeless camp in Burnaby. This happened right at the time when the current Liberal government together with the NDP provincial government of British Columbia tried a pilot project of decriminalizing drugs. Now that is not working. Clearly it has been a disastrous failed experiment, and it is now being rolled back to some degree, but would the minister agree that it is a failed experiment that should be rolled back completely for the sake of public safety?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the decriminalization situation in B.C., Canadians need to understand that a request was put in by the B.C. government and received by us. We adhered to that request. When the request was made to change or modify the program in the past three to four weeks, we also received that request and made the changes.

The concerns outlined by the member opposite and the concerns outlined by the British Columbia government are shared by us and our government. Any individual would share those pressing safety concerns. That is why we have modified the application, and for the member's edification I will say that we have also rejected an application on a similar basis that was launched by the City of Toronto.

Business of Supply

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about Constable Greg Pierzchala of the OPP, who was murdered by a man who was out on bail for similar crimes. There were bail restrictions of course, but the police who were in charge of those told the justice committee that they did not have the tools, the resources, the ability or the manpower to be able to supervise those bail conditions.

What can the minister tell us about helping police and giving them the resources so they can keep people safe?

• (2140)

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, let me just outline the tremendous courage, bravery and service of people like Constable Pierzchala and Constable Yang. We are in debt, as always, to men and women in uniform who serve in this country. With respect to Constable Pierzchala, his murder started a very important conversation over a year ago about bail reform, which we responded to with pace, in conjunction with law enforcement and with provincial and territorial governments around the country. That produced Bill C-48, which we passed in a short amount of time, ensuring that we changed bail laws in this country.

Mr. Charles Sousa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Services and Procurement, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the growing problem of auto theft in Canada.

Our government has remained steadfast in its commitment to effectively combat auto theft. We have taken deliberate, effective and swift action, including by organizing the national auto theft summit, where we brought together partners and stakeholders from across government, industry and law enforcement to agree upon strategies to better respond to this issue.

Through the budget implementation act, we would amend the Criminal Code to provide additional tools for law enforcement and prosecutors to address auto theft. I really hope this is something that all parties in this place can get behind. I am going to speak to each of these amendments in turn.

Canadians are concerned with the increasingly violent nature of auto theft and the involvement of organized crime groups. To effectively respond to these concerns, Bill C-69 would enact new offences targeting auto theft and its links to violence and organized crime, punishable by a maximum of 14 years.

These offences are important. They explicitly recognize the increased severity of blame that exists when someone not only steals a car, but also uses violence to achieve it. Carjackings are traumatic not only for the victims, but also for those who may witness such brazen acts of violence. With changes proposed, the government is unequivocally denouncing such conduct. Make no mistake; such conduct will be responded to in a manner that reflects its seriousness.

No less serious is the link between auto theft and organized crime. We have all seen the news that demonstrates the sophisticated criminal operations that have fuelled the increase in auto theft in Ontario and Quebec. Cars are stolen in communities and quickly brought to Montreal where they are put on ships for sale in other countries. Such activities cannot be accomplished without organized crime. Not only does the crime line the pockets of criminals,

but it also provides them with the resources to engage in other illicit activities. All of this threatens the stability, safety and prosperity of our communities.

I am encouraged to see our government, together with other levels of government, proposing thoughtful and targeted responses to get at the heart of this illegal activity. Moreover, working together with our law enforcement partners, we have learned that organized crime entities are advancing modern technology for car theft. They are targeting vehicles equipped with keyless ignition systems, employing software to unlock and start those cars remotely.

This understanding prompted our government to propose changes that would create new offences for possession and distribution of devices used to commit auto theft punishable by a maximum of 10 years by indictment. This makes eminent sense as we want to get at the related activities that make auto theft easier to commit.

The government is also proposing changes to tackle the money, a critical side of organized crime. We know that targeting money-laundering operations is a crucial element in an effective response to the crime. It is essential to disrupt the availability of laundered funds that contribute to keeping criminal groups in operation.

Bill C-69 would reaffirm the offence of laundering the proceeds of crime for the benefit of a criminal organization, punishable by a maximum of 14 years. Again, that is an example of a targeted response in the fight against organized crime, whether the laundered funds came from auto theft or any other crime.

I was also pleased to see amendments proposed to respond to the reality that criminal organizations are involving youth in crime, including motor vehicle theft and carjacking. We need to make amendments to stop organized crime groups from involving youth. It is reprehensible, no matter the offence.

The new factor applies to advancing sentencing where there is evidence the offender is the ringleader, involving a person under the age of 18. It is critical that an offence implicitly recognize this. It is imperative that we take decisive action to prevent criminal organizations from exploiting vulnerable young people in such heinous activities.

• (2145)

In addition to establishing new offences to enhance efforts against auto theft, amendments proposed by the budget implementation act would also provide law enforcement with access to investigative tools for these offences, including wiretap authorizations and DNA warrants.

Business of Supply

Our government is proposing changes to the Criminal Code that would actually combat auto theft. The Leader of the Opposition is trotting out rhetoric and failed policies and claiming it will solve the problem. We know his proposals will not work. He knows his proposals will not work, in fact, but he is going to try to sell us a bill of goods anyway. On this side of the House, we are focused on actual solutions.

Let us keep in mind the Criminal Code is only one tool, among many, used to fight auto theft. Bill C-69, the budget implementation act, also includes measures that would crack down on auto theft by amending the Radiocommunication Act to regulate the sale, possession, distribution and import of devices used to steal cars. This would enable law enforcement agencies to capture and remove devices believed to be used to steal cars from the Canadian marketplace.

Beyond legislative changes, our government is investing heavily in cracking down on auto theft, including \$15 million to support motor vehicle investigations and stolen vehicle recovery. Of course, combatting organized crime is essential in those stolen vehicles being returned. It is also a pivotal part of the issue at hand. I was heartened to read that nearly 600 vehicles were recovered from the port of Montreal last month before they could be illegally shipped overseas.

Cracking down on auto theft means cracking down on international organized crime. That is why the government is investing \$3.5 million in funding to Interpol's joint transnational vehicle crime project to enhance information sharing and investigative tactics to identify and retrieve those stolen vehicles around the world.

To the same end, the government is also investing \$28 million to detect and search shipping containers for stolen vehicles, as well as enhance collaboration on intelligence sharing with partners around Canada and internationally to help identify those involved within the supply chain and arrest those who are perpetuating the crimes.

The government is also committed to extending \$9.1 million to provincial, territorial and municipal police forces, through the contribution program to combat serious and organized crime, to increase their capacity to take custody of detained stolen vehicles from the Canada Border Services Agency.

Cracking down on guns and gangs is a key part of combatting auto theft, which is why the government is also investing \$121 million in funding to the Province of Ontario to help prevent gun and gang violence, including organized crime and motor vehicle theft, through the initiative to take action against gun and gang violence.

Motor vehicle theft presents a multi-faceted challenge that requires a comprehensive solution. The proposed legislative amendments, along with significant investments, recognize this.

Too many families and too many victims, in my community especially, are being affected by the disturbing rise in auto theft and home invasion. It affects people at home. It affects people emotionally. It is a serious issue. We must do everything we can, working together, to stop this violence and protect our communities. It is not to heckle and not to persuade others to do otherwise. We need to work together and find the opportunity to fix this matter. I appreciate this opportunity to address it as well.

• (2150)

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I appreciate from the member's comments is that he obviously delves into his experience as a past minister of finance in Ontario. He understands, as law enforcement has continuously explained to me, that gone are the days of a teenager off on a joyride, stealing a car from someone's home.

This is an organized effort that is very profitable for international crime ranks. That is what we are dealing with here. In order to address auto theft, we need to address the path of the money.

How are we doing that? There are six measures, and some of them were touched upon by my colleague. We are addressing challenges with prosecuting third party money launderers by amending the money-laundering offence. That is in the fall economic statement that, unfortunately, the members opposite have been obstructing.

Second, we are responding to the rapidly evolving nature of financial crime by adapting the production order for financial data so that it more effectively applies to accounts associated with digital assets. We know what that party thinks about digital assets, because at one point the Conservative leader opined that crypto was the way out of inflation. Thankfully, the Bank of Canada was not listening.

Third, we also know that modernizing provisions related to the search, seizure and restraint of proceeds of crime is critical, which is also in the fall economic statement.

Fourth, there is a provision in the current budget implementation bill that deals with issuing an order to require a financial institution to keep an account open to assist in the investigation of a suspected criminal offence.

Fifth, there is a provision that would allow for issuing a repeat production order to authorize law enforcement to obtain ongoing specified information on activity in an account or multiple accounts.

The members opposite love to listen to law enforcement. I would urge them to do this, at least on this one occasion, because law enforcement is asking for these tools that they are actively voting against.

The last piece is an offence that would explicitly criminalize operating a money service business that is not registered with FINTRAC. That is really critical because that is something that again helps us to track the money.

Business of Supply

With the learned knowledge of my friend, in terms of his background in finance, he has applied a critical lens to what we are doing on auto theft. If members think that we can tackle this one at a time, by targeting adolescents who have been deployed by an organized crime ring, and solve the auto theft crisis, the members are sorely mistaken.

In order to do this, we need to operate on multiple fronts, including tracking the money. That is what these auto theft provisions would do. That is why we are behind them and are proceeding with them with pace. We just wish the Conservatives would get on board.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for his leadership and his engagement on this critically important file, as well as working alongside other levels of government, collaborating with all who share the same concern to combat it. The minister is doing a fine job.

I also want to ask about the indigenous community and the issue of reconciliation, specifically around Bill S-13. Could the minister update us on that issue, in terms of how we are advancing the issue to support the first nations people?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for raising this, because I do not think we have talked enough about indigenous reconciliation in the context of this evening's interventions.

What Bill S-13 would do is simply and surgically amend the Interpretation Act, such that all federal legislation would be interpreted so as not to derogate from aboriginal and treaty rights that are protected under Section 35 of the Constitution.

Right now, we have a checkerboard, where every individual piece of legislation has to insert this interpretive provision. If we simply amend the Interpretation Act, it would oversee the interpretation of all federal legislation and obviate the need for doing so.

We have consulted on this. We have worked with indigenous leadership on this. We have a bill that has worked its way through the Senate. That bill is something that actually should command unanimous consent in this chamber. I hope we can expeditiously pass it to do right by aboriginal and treaty rights that are constitutionally protected and need to be interpreted in that manner.

Mr. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, protecting our Constitution is critical, and I hope all in this House share that same concern.

Could the minister elaborate or give us a sense of what it was previously? Did the former Conservative government have the same engagement with the indigenous community in order to make things right, in order to collaborate and promote their engagement in our society and their prosperity?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that is an absolute and resounding no. The investments made were at one third of the level of investments that we are making in indigenous communities and with rights holders around this country.

We have empowered national indigenous organizations. We have created permanent bilateral mechanisms. We launched the missing and murdered indigenous women's inquiry. We are responding to

calls to action under the TRC and calls for justice under the MMIWG.

My office has created a special interlocutor to look at the unmarked graves and how to address that pressing issue. The work continues apace. The work will take time. It will take many generations to resolve.

However, we are on a path forward that is much more demonstrably palpable in terms of our willingness to collaborate, work in partnership with and, indeed, co-develop legislation with indigenous peoples. That is a hallmark of the way we need to work on the go-forward.

That is a hallmark of our government. We will continue on that path, despite sometimes facing considerable opposition by the official opposition.

• (2155)

Mr. Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, this is my last question: Can the minister reaffirm to the House how important it is to protect safety in our communities, how it is important to fight crime, and how it is important that other provincial jurisdictions also have a responsibility, especially in regard to bail?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, a priority for any government is keeping the community safe. Our commitment to this remains steadfast in terms of protecting women from intimate partner violence, protecting children from child sex predators, protecting all Canadians from gun violence, protecting people from hatred and ensuring that the sex offender registry is replaced. Our commitment remains steadfast to ensuring that Canadians are kept safe in their communities, and we will continue in that vein.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am going to use my time to ask questions, make comments and get feedback and answers from the minister.

To begin, I would like to commend the minister's attitude this evening. I do not know whether he has been sent to the committee of the whole as punishment for doing something wrong but, quite frankly, I think he is answering questions seriously and honestly. I think that should be recognized, especially after such a long day. I would also like to commend the work of the advisers accompanying him. I thank everyone for being here this evening.

The House has recognized Quebec as a nation. The Supreme Court of Canada has noted Quebec's distinct legal traditions and social values. Does the minister recognize that the Quebec nation and the Canadian nation have distinct social values and different legal traditions?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I thank my colleague for his opening comments.

Business of Supply

Second, Quebec obviously has a civil law system, which is different. That is very clear in our customs and conventions. That is why there are always three judges on the Supreme Court of Canada who are civil law experts. The court needs that when drafting decisions and ruling on cases from Quebec.

In my younger days, maybe 27 years ago, I myself spent a semester studying law at Université Laval so I could be more conscious of and informed about Quebec's civil law system.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, I see the minister's younger days happened a lot more recently than mine.

Given that Quebec is a nation with distinct social values and a different legal tradition, I would like to know if the minister agrees that Quebec laws cannot be evaluated and interpreted through the lens of Canadian values and the Canadian legal tradition. Does the Minister of Justice recognize that to do so would be incongruous?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, my role as minister for the entire country is to collaborate, co-operate and try to better understand Quebec's justice system and legal system. I need to be better informed in order to serve the entire population, both in Quebec and outside Quebec. It is a challenge for someone who comes from outside Quebec, but it is a challenge that I have taken on.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, in light of what I said earlier about the difference between the social values and legal traditions of Quebec and Canada, will the minister commit to supporting the spirit of the bill that was introduced by my colleague, the member for Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou? This bill responds to the aspirations of the Quebec National Assembly and also to the will of the vast majority of Quebecers. It seeks to allow advance requests for medical assistance in dying in Quebec.

• (2200)

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, first of all, with respect to medical assistance in dying, I am already listening to the concerns, wishes and hopes of the Government of Quebec.

Second, so far, we have always taken a national approach to medical assistance in dying when it comes to changes to the Criminal Code and laws on murder that are affected by any changes in this area.

I would also like to point out that we already have a panel of medical experts and health care officials who have looked at what needs to be done and what needs to be protected in the case of advance requests.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, our request is quite clear and is the result of a lengthy, extremely rigorous, sensitive and serious reflection within Quebec society.

The minister does not seem to want to make an exception to the Criminal Code for Quebec. However, he did so for British Columbia. Does he consider Quebec's demands less important when it comes to such a crucial issue? Why would he not make an exception for Quebec as he did for British Columbia?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, we listened to British Columbia. We are listening to the hopes and objectives of the Province of Quebec. That is the first thing.

The second thing is to take care not to draw an analogy between the decriminalization of narcotics and requests for exceptions.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, I will move on to another subject that I think is extremely important: Bill C-63.

Earlier this evening, my colleague, the member for Avignon—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, addressed this issue, among others, regarding the Bloc Québécois's suggestion to split part 1 of Bill C-63 from the other parts so that the digital safety commission can be created as quickly as possible.

My concern is that we are all witnessing and aware of an appalling proliferation of hateful content on social media, including disinformation and aggressive fake accounts, often directed at vulnerable individuals or groups. This should be very worrisome not just to individuals, but to society as a whole.

How does the minister intend to pass a bill that is already being challenged, in a time frame that reflects the urgency of the situation?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, we must move quickly to pass the bill in its entirety. I would like to remind the member opposite that when this bill went through first reading, I was accompanied by a lady named Carla Beauvais. She is a Black, Afro-Canadian Quebecker who has repeatedly spoken about all the hate she received because she was trying to talk about the George Floyd case, which happened three years ago.

This type of hate needs to be eliminated through a comprehensive bill. It does not just affect children. Online hate and prejudice affects teenagers and adults, like Carla Beauvais. This Quebecker has the right to legal recourse, which is the aim of this bill.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, we agree on the urgent need to act on online safety. The problem is out there and it is urgent. It affects all groups.

How does the minister think the digital platforms and digital giants, which control social media, will react to a piece of legislation that they, and probably our Conservative colleagues too, believe will further hamper freedom of expression as they see it?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, it was actually a very nice surprise to see the reactions of major platforms like Facebook. Just a week ago, for instance, I was at the Empire Club in downtown Toronto. During a dinner, I gave a 25-minute speech that was managed and sponsored by Facebook.

The digital giants are with us. They know that there is a problem that needs to be fixed. They want to work with us, my team and our government, to resolve the situation and protect Canadians.

Business of Supply

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, I will keep an open mind and hope to be surprised. It is a far cry from the attitude and approach we saw from Meta during our most recent legislative efforts.

In October 2021, the Commissioner of Official Languages, Raymond Th  berge, responded to a complaint by a Montreal lawyer asking for translations of Supreme Court rulings handed down prior to 1970. The recommendation was brought to the attention of the Supreme Court, which has yet to take action. The court did not follow up on the Commissioner of Official Languages' recommendations.

Will the minister commit to provide the Supreme Court of Canada with the resources to translate its pre-1970 decisions?

• (2205)

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to point out that Meta's response was also surprising, because there are a lot of penalties set out in Bill C-63, but Meta is still comfortable working with us.

With regard to the second question, I want to say that we stand up for the protection of both official languages across Canada under the Official Languages Act.

If that means giving the courts and the federal court administration across Canada more funding, then we are there to listen to those concerns and provide the resources necessary to improve access to justice in both official languages, including French, for all Canadians.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear that and I am taking note of it because we are talking about more than 6,000 rulings, many of which are important references for numerous lawyers in Quebec and Canada. This mainly affects French-speaking lawyers, obviously, because the translation that was not done was into French. The documents are available only in English.

If I understand correctly, the minister is committing to providing resources so that this recommendation from 2021 can finally be implemented by the Supreme Court. Am I hearing a commitment from him on that this evening?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, as I have mentioned several times this evening, I am in contact with the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, Chief Justice Wagner. I have spoken with him about his hopes for the administration of the courts across Canada. I also want to point out that technology can be used to accomplish certain things in relation to the courts. For example, with artificial intelligence, we can take care of translation needs—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Drummond.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, I want to stick with the topic of the justice system. There has been a lot of talk about the shortage of judges in Quebec and Canada. We hear a lot of complaints about backlogs in the justice system. There is obviously a shortage of judges, and I heard the minister say earlier that he is making every effort to fill the judicial vacancies in Quebec and Canada. However, there are other phenomena, other things that often slow down the justice system. Cases are often subject to stays of proceedings, when the Jordan decision is usually invoked.

In addition to his commitment to ensuring that judicial vacancies are filled in a timely manner, does the minister have any other solutions to propose to improve the performance of the justice system?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, there is a lot to say. First, I added people to my ministerial team. I sped up background checks for candidates. I extended the eligibility period for a candidate who has already been assessed to three years. I extended the terms of each committee that makes recommendations on judicial appointments. I am working in close collaboration with judges themselves to understand their needs, for example in Quebec, in such expertise, in criminal law, in family law, et cetera. We are working as fast as we can to appoint more judges and to provide judges to the courts that need them.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, will the minister reconsider the decision not to require French-English bilingualism for the commissioners of the future miscarriage of justice review commission, or will French once again be optional in Canada?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the creation of this commission is centred on access to justice. In order to have access to justice before this commission, people must be understood, which requires a translation system that—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Drummond.

Mr. Martin Champoux: Mr. Speaker, my next question may be a little long. I am going to present a scenario, which will give the minister plenty of time to answer.

The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage is currently studying Bill C-316, which deals with a program that we want to create a framework for and that we hope will become permanent. The Bloc Qu  b  cois defended this program during the years of the Harper government, which wanted to abolish it. We fought alongside other opposition parties at the time to protect this program, which is very important for advancing the rights of francophones outside Quebec and for advancing the human rights of many individuals and groups.

The current program includes a provision that prevents the federal government from funding challenges of Quebec or provincial legislation through the human rights branch. We think it would be appropriate for Quebec, as a nation repeatedly recognized by Parliament, to have access to a similar provision, an asymmetry provision for Quebec, to ensure that the program cannot fund challenges to the Charter of the French Language. This would help us protect the French language in Quebec while continuing to actively advocate for the advancement of francophones outside Quebec.

Will the minister accept the Bloc Qu  b  cois's offer of help and agree to consider suggested amendments to Bill C-316 to this effect?

• (2210)

The Speaker: It was a long question. The minister therefore has only 49 seconds to respond.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I have several responses to give.

Business of Supply

First, the court challenges program was created by a Liberal government. It was eliminated by Harper's Conservative government and then reinstated by our government.

Second, the program is not managed by me, but by the Minister of Canadian Heritage, because the Attorney General and the Department of Justice are significantly involved in many cases. We are always either the defendant or the complainant in the cases.

Finally, with respect to the situation he mentioned, I will follow up to get a little more information about those concerns.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am going to try to do something. The canvassing of issues this evening has been extraordinary and, I am afraid, all too often, superficial.

I want to dive into a couple of things and just ask the minister for his reflections because this is tough stuff. I do not think there is a single Canadian who is not grieved whenever somebody “out on bail” commits a crime and some innocent person's whole life is ruined. They may have lost a relative. They will never get over it. The family that was involved in the high-speed crash on Highway 401 is a heartbreaking example.

During the conversation about this earlier tonight, it was said that the man responsible for this was out on bail. When one examines it, the individual who died in the crash, and who clearly had violated a number of laws, or was accused of violating laws, and who was under bail conditions not to be behind the wheel of a vehicle, should not have been chased. It is complicated.

Who is responsible for a high-speed crash going the wrong way down the 401 that kills grandparents and an infant? It is all too simple to say that it is the person who was under bail conditions not to drive, but the high-speed chase that ensued was, from everything I have seen, against all police protocols. The person who had committed the crime had committed the crime of a liquor store theft. He was not thought to be at risk of violently offending or about to kill, abduct or kidnap someone. The high-speed chase was seen to be, by many law enforcement officials, the wrong reaction at the wrong moment, and it led to tragedy.

Does the minister have any thoughts on that particular example?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for her contribution. I would underscore that bail decisions are made by individual justices of the peace or provincial court judges across the country all of the time. They are always trying to work according to the three principles I mentioned, which are flight risks, the likelihood of reoffending, and the message being sent to the community to ensure confidence in the administration of justice.

With respect to police actions, I think that bears some inquiry into why a police pursuit was taking place in the wrong direction on the highway in that instance.

I will share with the hon. member the incredible sadness and sympathy that I feel for the family that suffered such a horrific loss. What we are working constantly to do is to ensure fewer fatal acci-

dents of that nature and that we are keeping Canadians as safe as possible at all times.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I think all these specific examples that are exploited end up leading people to doubt some of the fundamentals of our British common law criminal justice system, which is that one is innocent until proven guilty. People out on bail are essentially legally innocent people. They have not been found guilty of crimes.

We can take the example, recently, of Umar Zameer, who was involved in a tragic accident in which a police officer was killed in July 2021. The prosecution and the justice system decided to charge him with first-degree murder, which would indicate that he knowingly knew this was a policeman and that he deliberately killed him. He was not released. He was only found not guilty nearly three years later, and in the court, in an extraordinary measure, the judge apologized to Mr. Zameer.

His lawyer, Mr. Nader Hasan, reports that he was also harassed and received hate mail for the horror that he would represent someone who was charged with first-degree murder. Again, this was someone who nearly had his liberties taken from him forever, in what was a very harsh prosecution, but the essence of the response, immediately when he was released on bail, from public figures whom I respect, such as former Toronto mayor John Tory, was “How could this happen?” and “this is dreadful”.

Does the minister have any concerns, as I do, that if we fail to remember that we are innocent until proven guilty in our criminal law system, we are at larger peril than the individual cases we are talking about?

● (2215)

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, the Umar Zameer case exemplifies the importance of being judicious in our language and ensuring that we do not wade into decisions that govern criminal prosecutions and decisions that are being made by our courts and our justices of the peace. There has never been a more clear example to my mind. However, I would underscore that the presumption of innocence also includes a presumption and an entitlement to not be denied reasonable bail without just cause. That is protected under section 11(e) of the charter, and its salutary impact is demonstrably exemplified in the Umar Zameer case.

What I found very troubling is that a number of politicians of various stripes waded into that matter, decrying, in the first instance, the abject horror of the notion of someone like Mr. Zameer being granted bail. He was ultimately vindicated and found to have been not guilty. I think that demonstrates that the work the system does is necessary, and it is doing the work that it needs to do in an impartial and independent manner.

Business of Supply

It goes back to some of the interventions we heard earlier from the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo when he talked about my attendance in court during open court processes. Attempts to influence actively, or even the perceptions of such influence, are untoward in this country. That is inappropriate behaviour that should never be countenanced, and comments on the appropriateness or not of a bail decision in a given matter are equally inappropriate and not suitable in a democracy such as ours, where we need to safeguard the lines between independent prosecutions and adjudication and political involvement.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, it seems that the bail supervision programs, which are cost-effective, are quite underfunded. Am I correct that those are funded through provincial and territorial governments?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, bail supervision and the monitoring bail in how changes land on the ground, who is getting bail and who is not, is absolutely funded by the provinces. We have been encouraging them to track this information better so that we can make any further changes that are required.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned what is cost-effective because it is about \$120,000 a year per inmate to keep people in jail, and there are currently more legally innocent people awaiting trial, who are still legally presumed innocent until proven guilty, in the jails of our provinces and territories than there are people who have been proven guilty. Does the minister understand that to be the case?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I absolutely understand that to be the case. It really undercuts this narrative that bail is somehow too facile to obtain in this country when 70% of the population of prisons around the country are actually on remand. That is exactly commensurate with other peer countries. I think that underscores the point that the issues that need to be addressed are widespread and include how we track bail and the decisions that are being made by justices of the peace.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I have never practised criminal law, but members of my family have been prosecutors. The question that occurs to me often, and one of the things that seems outside the jurisdiction of the federal government, is whether it would not be salutary to find some way that, when someone violates bail conditions or their surety is not observing them, bail would actually be collected. As a general matter, people put money forward as bail money for someone to be released on bail, but when those conditions are violated, does the minister have any data as to how often the bail money is then collected from those who put it forward?

• (2220)

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important suggestion. I do not have that data, but I can assure the member that, at my next federal-provincial-territorial meeting, which is in Yellowknife in the fall, I will raise this very issue. We have raised issues about how we are changing the bail rules at the federal level, but how they are landing on the ground in terms of supervision of bail, and when bail is violated, whether monies are collected, is an important issue that I will raise at that meeting.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I would like to turn to Bill C-63. I support Bill C-63, the online hate bill, but I do not think it adequately gets to some of the questions of algorithms.

I think we have a real problem with rage farming. Some of the examples I have raised tonight are specifically useful because they raise ire and quick reaction and can be used to change public opinion through the manufacturing of a degree of rage that might otherwise not exist if all the facts were thoroughly discussed.

Does the minister believe that Bill C-63 could get at something like rage farming without getting at the algorithms?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I have a few responses. First of all, Bill C-63 contemplates a responsibility to file a digital safety plan with the new commissioner to indicate how one is going to moderate risk for one's users, and lastly, to be vetted against that moderation and to be subject to penalties or orders by the digital safety commissioner.

It also contemplates the idea that the digital safety commissioner could green-light researchers at universities around the country to get access to some of the inner workings of the platforms. This has been hailed by people like Frances Haugen, the famous Facebook whistle-blower, as internationally leading legislation on promoting some of the transparency the member opposite is seeking, which I seek as well.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I would like to turn to the question of the Victims Bill of Rights. When the Canadian Victims Bill of Rights was going through this place, I had the honour to be a member of Parliament at that time. I worked with then ombudsperson Sue O'Sullivan, who was trying to get some specific ways of enforcing the Victims Bill of Rights. It is one thing to write the Victims Bill of Rights, but Canada is pretty well known around the world as having rights for victims that cannot be enforced.

I wonder if the minister is open to looking at the way the State of California pursues protecting victims' rights to information, emotional support and so on through what in California is called Marsy's Law.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I would be very open to looking at what is transpiring in California. Centring victims at the heart of our criminal justice strategy is important, and we have been attempting to do that with respect to victims of hatred, through the online hate bill; victims of child sex predation, through Bill C-63; victims of intimate partner violence, through our changes to the bail regime, not once but twice, through Bill C-48 and Bill C-75; and fundamentally, victims of gun violence in this country, through bills like Bill C-21, which would put a freeze on handgun sales and ensure tougher penalties with respect to things like gun trafficking. These are important provisions, but I am definitely willing to entertain suggestions about what California is doing and look at whether the model could be brought over.

Business of Supply

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that concern victims and their families is the sort of black box around plea bargaining. Victims' impact statements can happen at the point of an open court, but plea bargaining leaves victims and families out. I wonder if the minister has any thoughts on how Canada could get the balance right to ensure that victims and their families have more access to consideration in the plea bargaining process.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I would just reflect on the fact that when we were looking at Bill S-12, if I remember the number correctly, with the sex offender registry, we heard greatly from victims about the context of things like non-disclosure agreements and where their autonomy was vitiated, and we looked at how we could recalibrate that so they could have control over their information. That is important and guides me in the work I do. What I would also underscore is that in the victims fund, we injected an amount of \$40 million in 2023-24 to support victim-focused measures.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I also recall that when we were debating that and other issues in this place relating to mandatory minimums, there was a fair degree of evidence and concern that as jurisdictions used mandatory minimums, that tended to decrease what a judge did at the moment of sentencing and increase the likelihood of plea bargaining, as defence lawyers realized they were not going to have much option because there was a mandatory minimum associated. I wonder if the minister has any thoughts on whether plea bargaining is more likely when there are mandatory minimum sentences over many offences.

• (2225)

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I understand the gist of the member's question, but what we have seen in tracking the data is that when there is a mandatory minimum in place, it actually results in longer processes because plea bargaining does not occur as frequently, because the nature of the minimum penalty is already entrenched in law. That has resulted in more judicial resources and more delays. In fact, Ben Perrin, who is the individual who has been involved with a great deal of mandatory minimum considerations, a former adviser to Stephen Harper, described them as “a grave policy failure and cheap politics” and said, “Poilievre's idea may actually backfire, leading to more—

The Speaker: I want to inform the hon. minister and all hon. members that when referring to members of Parliament, even if they are quoting, they are to refer to them by their riding names or by the position they hold and not by their names.

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the minister will not be surprised that I want to turn to Bill C-69 and the sections relating to the Impact Assessment Act. I never did practise constitutional law, but I have been consulting with some constitutional law experts. The minister brought the bill forward, so he must think it will meet the standards of the Supreme Court of Canada that this is federal jurisdiction. I do not. I wonder if the minister is open to considering changes, even at this stage, to ensure that environmental assessment is returned to the four squares of federal jurisdiction, as was the case under Brian Mulroney's version of environmental assessment, which was repealed by Stephen Harper.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, what I would say with respect to the Impact Assessment Act is that we have looked at the Supreme

Court decision from October 2023, and I am very confident that the proposed amendments would address the concerns identified by the court and establish a robust and constitutional impact process.

With respect to the mandatory minimum piece, I would quote David Daubney, a former Conservative MP, who said, “The proliferation of mandatory minimum sentencing will lead to fewer guilty pleas, significant processing delays, big increases in the number of accused persons awaiting trial in already overcrowded”—

The Speaker: The hon. minister has run out of time.

We will move on to the hon. member for Brantford—Brant.

Mr. Larry Brock (Brantford—Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to state at the outset I will be sharing my time with the member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo and the member for Regina—Qu'Appelle.

To the minister, through you, Mr. Speaker, how much is your gun grab going to cost Canadians?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would not use that terminology. I would say that when we put a national freeze on handgun sales through a bill like Bill C-21, we are keeping victims safe.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, the minister can reject the language all he wants. The fact is that the question is very relevant.

How much is the gun grab going to cost Canadians, for the second time, minister?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I think the better question would be on how much not addressing gun violence would cost Canadians in terms of their mental health and their physical health.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, it is clear Canadians are being denied the opportunity of hearing from Canada's chief legal officer, so I will supply the answer to Canadians, because clearly the minister does not want to provide clarity, transparency or accountability on the issue.

The answer is \$40 million.

How many guns has your government collected so far?

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Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, through bills like Bill C-21 and through funding allocations that the member voted against, what we are putting in place are tools for the CBSA and the RCMP to interdict guns and gun trafficking to get them out of the hands of criminals and people who would do harm in our country.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, it is so difficult for Canada's chief legal officer to be honest with Canadians, so I am going to ask the question again.

How many guns has the Government of Canada collected so far?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, what I would say, in terms of transparency, is that the member opposite's voting record includes voting against \$83 million in funding through supplementary estimates (B) that would help with gun and gang violence in this country.

• (2230)

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, I will ask the question again, very slowly, because clearly the minister has great difficulty understanding the question.

What is the number? How many guns have been collected, minister?

The Speaker: Questions should be posed through the Chair, not directly to members.

I would also remind all members to wait for their name to be recognized before taking the time. It does cut off the time that they have to respond.

The hon. minister has 16 seconds to reply.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, with respect to Bill C-21, I would just underscore that it also includes red flag and yellow flag provisions. As a former Crown, the member opposite will appreciate that they will help keep people safe through an emergency weapons prohibition order to immediately remove a firearm for up to 30 days from an individual who may pose a danger to themselves or others, such as the member's constituents in Brantford—Brant.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, again, it is incumbent upon the opposition to provide Canadians with transparency on this particular question. The answer is zero, to no surprise.

Here is the next question: How many guns will \$40 million collect off the streets?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I just want to underscore that Bill C-21, which the member voted against, actually proposed to increase maximum penalties from 10 year of imprisonments to 14 years for firearms-related offences, including firearms smuggling and trafficking, which is a pressing issue not just in his riding but everywhere around the country.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, clearly, he does not understand the question, so perhaps I will rephrase it.

For \$40 million, how many guns will that collect, minister?

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, that was at least the fourth time that the member directed his questions directly to the minister while asking a question and saying “minister”, “you” or “your”. Perhaps the Chair could remind the member of the

rules and remind him that all questions need to be asked through the Chair?

The Speaker: We appreciate that. The hon. member heard the intervention.

The hon. minister still has nine seconds on the clock to respond to the member for Brantford—Brant.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, what Bill C-21 will also do is improve the ability of CBSA to manage inadmissibility to Canada when foreign nationals commit firearms-related offences upon entry into this country.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, I would like just the number, through you.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, the number of women, potentially, who are going to be safeguarded through—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Brantford—Brant.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, through you, will the minister confirm that this plan will take guns from licensed, law-abiding hunters and anglers, and not illegal guns used to commit crimes?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, when I say that we are targeting things like the trafficking of guns and border controls, those are the very specific provisions that the member voted against.

Mr. Larry Brock: Mr. Speaker, why is the minister attacking licensed, law-abiding hunters and anglers?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, when the member voted against \$83 million to control the flow of illegal drugs across our border, he was not targeting licensed owners.

Mr. Frank Caputo (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Justice and Attorney General have a King's Counsel designation?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I would reiterate, in terms of our previous interactions, is that the notion of my appearing in an open court process would render any—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, there are people in my riding who are public officials, so I am not sure that really has any weight.

Does the Minister of Justice and Attorney General have a King's Counsel designation?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, as a former Crown attorney, he knows that even the mere appearance of the chief law officer of the Crown could render potential suspicion of influence on a process. That is why I would not appear during a live criminal proceeding.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, does he have a King's Counsel designation, yes or no?

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Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, avoiding court appearances in criminal matters by politicians would also be—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, does the minister have a King's Counsel designation, yes or no?

• (2235)

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, with respect to *sub judice*, the purpose is to protect parties in a case awaiting or undergoing a trial—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, does the minister have a King's Counsel designation, yes or no?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, with respect to my appearance in court—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, I will presume the minister does have a King's Counsel designation. Did he give one to himself?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite is aware, what I had indicated is that I have not been—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, will the minister just answer the question? Does he have a King's Counsel designation?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, my job is to be addressing the safety of Canadians and that is—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, would Constable Pierzchala's alleged killer have been detained on the bail law that the minister has lauded so many times today?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, Constable Pierzchala's death was a tragedy, and it motivated us to act, and act quickly. I am thankful for the support of that member in terms of the quick passage of that bill.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, without the minister looking at his cheat sheets, what are the tertiary grounds of detention?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, it is important always to be looking at confidence in the administration of justice.

The Speaker: Order. I am going to invite members, if they would like to have a conversation, to please do so outside. The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo has the floor to ask questions. It is important that the minister be able to hear that question and to be able to respond.

The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of Justice have a King's Counsel designation, yes or no?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I do not have a King's Counsel designation.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, what was the minimum sentence for robbery with a firearm prior to Bill C-5?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I believe it is governed by section 457 of the code.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, it was section 344, but what was the mandatory minimum sentence for robbery with a firearm prior to Bill C-5?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, it is four years for non-restricted or five or seven for a restricted.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, did Bill C-5 eliminate the non-restricted mandatory minimum penalty, yes or no?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-5 dealt with a number of issues that relate to mandatory minimum penalties, including the overrepresentation of indigenous and Black people in our justice system.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, is there still a mandatory minimum penalty for robbery with a non-restricted firearm, yes or no?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier in today's discussion, there remains a mandatory minimum penalty for people who are involved in a robbery with a restricted firearm, of five—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, I am so glad the minister clarified that there is a mandatory minimum penalty for robbing somebody with a restricted or prohibited firearm. Does the minister think that this is what goes through somebody's head? "I am going to go commit a robbery of that 7-Eleven. Wait a minute. This is a restricted or prohibited firearm. Hold off. I am not doing it." Does the minister think that is what goes through someone's head?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, what is important to reflect on with respect to the mandatory minimum penalty discussion are the words of Ben Perrin, the former chief legal adviser to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who said, "MMPs are ineffective at reducing crime, may actually increase recidivism, are highly vulnerable to being struck down by courts as unconstitutional, can increase delays in an overburdened system and perpetuate—

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Frank Caputo: Mr. Speaker, if there are drive-by shootings with no mandatory minimum penalty, are you okay with that?

An hon. member: I have a point of order.

The Speaker: I understand that the point of order is going to be raised but I am going to presume that the hon. member for Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo is asking a question through the Chair.

We will have a very brief answer by the hon. minister.

Business of Supply

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, what I am very concerned about is the use of firearms in offences and that is why we have taken significant action on assault rifles—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Regina—Qu'Appelle has five minutes.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there has been so much misinformation from the Minister of Justice, so I am going to try one last time to get some clarity around some key points.

The NDP-Liberal government made a conscious decision to not just make it easier but actually force judges to grant bail for dangerous and repeat offenders. That was in their bill, Bill C-75. Since those changes in the government's bill, has the overall crime rate in Canada gone up or down?

● (2240)

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-75 dealt with a number of things. It dealt with trial delays. It dealt with responding to Jordan. It dealt with changing how to select a jury trial after the Gerald Stanley matter and the systemic racism that was disclosed. It also dealt with enhancing penalties for things like auto theft, which that member voted against.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, I will get to auto theft in a moment, but first I want to just clarify: Bill C-75 made specific changes to make bail easier for dangerous and repeat offenders. I am not talking about any other aspect of bill C-75. Since those specific changes in Bill C-75, has the overall crime rate gone up or down in Canada?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that as a former Speaker, the member used to consult Speakers' decisions, but I also would appreciate that he knows about Supreme Court jurisprudence. What Bill C-75 did was codify a Supreme Court decision called “Antic”. The law was already in place. We took that law from the court cases and put it into the Criminal Code. That is what codification involves.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, no judge ordered the government to make it easier to restrict judges from looking at other options, including keeping dangerous and repeat offenders in jail longer. The direct result of Bill C-75 is that Canada now has a catch-and-release bail system. The minister does not have to take my word for it. He can listen to the Victoria Police Department, which said in a statement, “Bill C-75, which came into effect nationally in 2019, legislated a 'principle of restraint' that requires police to release an accused person at the earliest possible opportunity”.

Let us look at what that language says. It specifically states, “a peace officer, justice or judge shall give primary consideration to the release of the accused at the earliest reasonable opportunity and on the least onerous conditions”.

Can the minister just answer a simple question? There are only two options: Since Bill C-75, either the crime rate went up or the crime rate went down. After nine years of the Liberal-NDP government, has the crime rate in Canada gone up or down?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, with the utmost respect, I want to elaborate on a couple of points. First, when a court, such as the Supreme Court of Canada, renders a decision, the administration of justice and justice actors like myself follow that guidance. That is how the rule of law operates in this country.

Second, with respect to statutes, there is a guiding statute, a supreme statute. It is called the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I know that is sometimes inconvenient for the members opposite, because they want to just trample on it using the notwithstanding clause, but that charter, including in section 11(e), safeguards a right to reasonable bail not to be denied without just cause.

These points are perhaps inconvenient for the member asking the questions, and certainly for his leader, but they are not an inconvenience for me or for our government. We stand by them to implement those charter rights and safeguard the rights of all Canadians.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, I understand why the minister is so desperate not to answer the question and is hiding behind things that he knows are just not true. It is because crime has gone up massively: Homicides are up 43% since the Liberal government took over, gang-related homicides are up 105%, and violent gun crimes are up 101%.

On the one hand, the minister talks about how bad mandatory minimums are; on the other, he brags that the government actually kept some mandatory minimums. It is completely incoherent. He is completely self-contradictory.

He talked about car thefts. Did the Government of Canada expand the use of conditional sentencing, in other words, house arrest, for criminals who steal cars, yes or no?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, the principle of restraint from the Antic decision does not dictate the outcome of a specific bail hearing. That is fundamental to understand. It does not require the release of a person. It does not change the basis upon which someone can be detained.

With respect to auto theft, for the member's edification, when something or someone is subject to a period of imprisonment of longer than two years, they are automatically immunized from the potential availability of a conditional sentence order. There is also a mandatory minimum penalty that applies for repeat auto theft offenders, and that also immunizes them from the potential conditional sentence order.

● (2245)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Mr. Speaker, that is a very long way of saying, yes, the Liberals have granted house arrest to dangerous car thieves; as a result, car thefts have gone up massively—

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Business of Supply

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I would indicate that, since the changes and investments that we put in place with respect to auto theft, more than 1,000 vehicles have been intercepted by the CBSA at the Montreal port. This shows that those investments are doing the work they need to do to keep Canadians safe.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise in the House, particularly at this time and with this august group, and indeed in the presence of wonderful colleagues across the way.

The member for Regina—Qu'Appelle and I had the opportunity to speak on a panel yesterday. It was wonderful to see that he is continuing his ongoing masterclass in misinformation in the chamber. It is important for all of us as Canadians to reflect on the consequences when misinformation is spread, or perhaps when elected leaders choose to openly challenge the rights of others.

I want to talk a little today about a woman's right to choose. I want to start by asking all of us whether or not we truly believe in freedom, the freedom of a woman to make decisions for what happens to her body. On this side of the House, we have been very clear that this is a priority for us. It has always been something that we will defend. That is why it is of grave concern to many of my constituents in Vancouver Granville to hear so many members opposite willing to really question or begin to put doubt into the minds of Canadians as to whether or not their party would indeed defend a woman's right to choose.

In fact, we have heard members opposite making comments such as that women who have abortions end up needing redemption, needing forgiveness and needing God. One of the members opposite said this and said that she spoke for all MPs from the Conservative Party. That was a week ago, not 40, 50 or even 20 years ago. It was seven or eight days ago. If Canadians look at the chamber as the chamber that is supposed to uphold their freedoms, I do not understand how members opposite in the Conservative Party could truly be purveyors of freedom when all they want to do is take away the rights of women.

We have seen Conservative governments across this country try to curtail the rights of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals because they do not believe they fit with their socially conservative way of living. That is also a concern for any of us that purport to care about freedom. If we in the chamber truly care about freedom, then every member of the House, including members opposite, would be actively supporting the rights of others, even those who may be different from them.

That is why I think it is so important for us to continue the fight for freedom. However, our definition of freedom, on this side of the House, is not to obfuscate, misinform or mislead unintentionally, but really to do the things that would cause Canadians to feel as though their Parliament, their parliamentarians, have their back.

Let us talk about ways in which members opposite have chosen not to have the back of Canadians, particularly when it comes to the question of freedom. We have seen the Leader of the Opposition openly cavorting with ideologically motivated violent extremists from Diagon. We have seen him visit camps where people have made claims that Canada is broken or that the Prime Minister must

be hanged. They have been actively engaging with white supremacists, brought them into this place and had meals with them.

How is that freedom? Is that the type of freedom that Canadians want? I think it is not. I think Canadians would like to know that their parliamentarians, the leaders whom they elect, care deeply about protecting their rights. That is why it was so disturbing for me to hear the Leader of the Opposition talk so freely about using the notwithstanding clause, about how he would choose to override the rights of others under his laws, and about how he would decide what laws were constitutional.

I have seen governments of all stripes, and I wonder what Canadians would ask. I wonder what Progressive Conservative prime ministers of the past would ask or would be thinking if they were to hear their once-grand party becoming the party of misinformation, the party of taking away the rights of others.

It makes perfect sense. The Leader of the Opposition and many of his acolytes were trained under Stephen Harper, who sought to set up a snitch line. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition was a key player in that and defended it.

• (2250)

They sought to take away the right to vote of women who wore the niqab. They sought to take away the right to vote of many Canadians. In fact, today, the Minister of Immigration had to make a decision to overturn many of the misguided policies of the members opposite in curtailing the rights of lost Canadians.

When I talk about freedom, members opposite are only interested in taking away the freedoms of people they do not like and preserving their own freedoms, the freedom to run up large expense accounts on the public purse, to have expensive champagne on the public purse or to travel to conventions on the public purse, but not the freedom for a woman to choose what happens to her own body, for a young person questioning their sexuality to feel like they can be safe in their community or for all those women and others who have been marred by violence in the home to feel safe. They want to put guns back in the homes of Canadians and in the hands of Canadians who may not need guns. Why anybody in this country would need a semi-automatic weapon like an AR-15, I do not know, but that is what members opposite want to do.

It is really important for us to spend a bit of time on this concept of freedom every single day and ask ourselves what kind of freedom we want for Canadians. Frankly, I would want freedom from the types of imposing views that the members opposite have on the rights of those who they may not consider the types of Canadians they want in this country.

Business of Supply

We have heard members opposite talk openly about taking away a woman's right to choose. We have seen them cavort with people who would like to take away the rights of people who look like me. We have seen them spend time with people who openly want to overthrow our democracy and undermine it at every turn, and they do it by spreading misinformation and hate and trying to sow discord among communities in this country. It is well past time that all members of this House take a position and say that it is no longer acceptable for us to say freedom for me, but not for thee. That is the position that the Conservative Party has chosen to take.

I will end with the following thought. If we truly believe in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, if we truly believe in our Constitution, if we truly believe in the notion of freedom for all Canadians, then are we not willing to stand up and say that these may not be rights that I need, but they are rights that others in this country might need? Is that not the type of country we want, where each and every one of us is prepared to stand up and defend the rights and freedoms of people we may consider different? On this side of the House, that is exactly what we seek to do. I am very fearful that members opposite will persist in trying to take away the rights of people who do not share their far-right, extremist views.

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his contribution to this evening's discussion and reflect on a couple of things.

What I personally found most troubling, as somebody who sat on the Emergencies Act parliamentary committee after the declaration, is that we know about extreme far-right movements. We know about what happened at the Coutts, Alberta border crossing, and we know about the group that was found there and about the weapons cache. That group was Diagon; weapons and ammunition were found there, and that resulted in charges being laid of conspiracy to commit murder against the RCMP.

That is the exact same group that the Leader of the Opposition was engaging with intentionally just a few weeks ago on the east coast of this country, and I think it really begs a lot of questions about whether someone stands for and with law enforcement or whether they stand with the people who have been charged with potentially doing harm to law enforcement.

The second point is that I have also heard assertions that we are misinterpreting what the member for Carleton said about the notwithstanding clause and in fact, if he used it, that it would only be in a restricted manner.

First of all, I do not necessarily believe that, given the voting and track record of the Leader of the Opposition in terms of restrictions on women's rights, including women's rights to choose and recent voting patterns about women's access to free contraception. Second, I would say that the proof in writing is already on the wall, as in other instances where Conservative or right-leaning leaders of provincial governments around this country have either invoked or threatened to invoke the notwithstanding clause in areas that do not relate to criminal justice law.

I think about the usage by Scott Moe with respect to the LGBTQ community or about the threatened usage by Danielle Smith against trans kids. I did not hear a peep from the Leader of the Opposition

about the inappropriateness of such an invocation of the notwithstanding clause, which really leads me to question, and I hope Canadians watching right now at this late hour are questioning, how much further it would go if it was invoked for the first time ever by a federal leader, should the member for Carleton assume the mantle of leadership in this country, and how many other rights would be subjugated.

These are really pressing concerns, and they should not be partisan, because they are about fundamental things like our basic rights and freedoms in this country. The member for Vancouver Granville put it quite clearly when he talked about how we do not get to do a grocery-style selection of which rights we are going to defend and which freedoms we are not going to defend. It is an entire package. It is called the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and it is important to stand up for all of the rights therein, even at times when it might not be popular, because ultimately those rights protect vulnerable people and vulnerable minorities from a potential tyranny of the majority. That is not the kind of Canada I want to live in. That is not the kind of Canada most Canadians want to live in.

What Canadians identify with, independent of their political stripe and independent of their voting patterns, are certain hallmarks about what defines us as Canadians, and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms is one of those key defining documents. That is why I stand behind it. That is why I always will stand behind it. My colleagues stand with me in that regard. I wish the official opposition would as well.

• (2255)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition voted against same-sex marriage. Does the Attorney General have any confidence that, if given the opportunity, the leader of the Conservative Party would use the notwithstanding clause to take that right away from 2SLGBTQI+ Canadians?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, in that regard I have serious doubts about that, based on the voting pattern that I have seen thus far and the actions that I have observed thus far from the Leader of the Opposition in terms of interactions with the LGBTQ community and willingness to stand up for the rights of the LGBTQ community. I do not see that demonstrated by his actions thus far, and I think that is quite amplified by the fact that I also have not seen him criticize invocations of the notwithstanding clause that are already occurring in provinces in this country against that very same community. I will judge him by his actions, and his actions leave a lot to be desired.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition voted against funding for Holocaust education and the Holocaust Education Centre in my riding. What confidence does the Attorney General have that the Leader of the Opposition, if given the opportunity, would continue to defund Holocaust education, and what would the consequences of that be?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I think that is actually appalling, given where we are with the alarming rise in anti-Semitism post October 7. We need to be doing everything we can to shore up the Jewish community and its need for safety and security at this time.

Business of Supply

Apropos of that, I find it very troubling that the opposition articulated by the Leader of the Opposition to a bill that I am shepherding through this chamber, Bill C-63, was so vociferous that he did not even wait to read the document. He came out against it before it was even tabled. This is the very same document that groups like CIJA have gone on record about, saying that if we tackle online hatred, we will help them stop anti-Semitism online from turning into real-world consequences in the physical world.

Bill C-63 is critical for the safety of the Jewish community, as it is critical for many vulnerable groups, including Muslims and Arabs in the LGBTQ community, the Black community and the indigenous community. That is what we need to stand for as Canadians. That is what the opposition leader is standing against.

● (2300)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, when he was in government, launched a snitch line and launched a full frontal attack against Muslims in this country.

What confidence should Muslim Canadians have that, if given the opportunity, the Leader of the Opposition would indeed go after Muslims and attack their rights again?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I think the track record of the previous Harper government, in which the Leader of the Opposition played a part in its cabinet, is demonstrably curious with respect to that barbaric cultural practices hotline suggestion, with respect to interdictions on the citizenship ceremonies and what people could wear, and with respect to approaches towards settlement of Syrian refugees and who would be selected for settlement in Canada and who would not. The track record is not an enviable one.

On this side of the House, we stand completely opposed to such policies and have implemented policies that are vastly different. That includes challenging Islamophobia. That includes funding for the security infrastructure program to protect places of worship. That includes Bill C-63, which would tackle Islamophobia head-on and help keep all Canadians safe.

Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be joining the House from the unceded lands of the Tseshah and Hupacasath people in Port Alberni on Vancouver Island in Nuu-chah-nulth territory.

We continue to hear the Liberal government talk about the toxic drug crisis as a public health issue, not a criminal justice issue. Will the minister tell us if he agrees that it is a public health issue, or is it a criminal justice issue in his eyes?

Hon. Arif Virani (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the opioid crisis and the narcotic situation that British Columbia is facing, we have adopted an approach that it needs to be treated as a health issue. We have adopted policies of harm reduction since 2015 and will continue to do so.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, why is the Liberal government making it a criminal issue east of the Rockies, for the rest of the country, if that is the position of the government?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, this issue has been dealt with as a health care issue since the start, and we have adopted that posture

in many of our policies, including responding to the very direct ask by the B.C. government to pursue decriminalizing.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, what evidence does the minister have in terms of public safety concerns linked to simple drug possession?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, many of these questions would perhaps be better put to the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions or the Minister of Health, but what I can say is that we have analyzed the evidence that we have in terms of responding to direct asks for decriminalization.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, these are justice issues and they are justice issues for every member of Parliament, so he can also answer with his position and viewpoint as a member of Parliament, not just as a cabinet minister.

How much does this government spend on policing drug offences versus investments in harm reduction and treatment and recovery?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, the police of jurisdiction would be able to answer that question on how much money is being spent on policing initiatives, including police of jurisdiction in localities such as Vancouver.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, regarding the decision to allow the recent amendment of B.C.'s decriminalization pilot and the rejection of the Toronto application, despite the fact that we have seen an 11% decrease in toxic drug deaths in British Columbia since March of 2023 and we have seen a 17% rise in toxic drug deaths in Alberta and a 23% rise in Saskatchewan, what analysis was done to ensure that the right to life, liberty and security of the person for people at risk of dying was adequately considered?

Also, will the minister agree that criminal law has not and will not end drug possession and the use of illicit substances?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I share the member's concerns about the deaths that are occurring. We are attempting to address this from a harm reduction perspective and a focus on health outcomes as opposed to criminal justice outcomes.

However, it is critical to understand that the responses that we have made have been at the behest or request of provinces or cities of jurisdiction. Thus far, we have had two such requests, one of which we granted and which we moderated when it was also requested of us, and the second one has been rejected.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, if that is the case, why did this government overrule the expertise of a local board of health and the support of the Toronto Police Service and cite public safety concerns to reject Toronto's decriminalization application?

● (2305)

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I would indicate that some of these questions might be best put at committee of the whole to the Minister of Health and the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, who will be here next Wednesday in a similar format. I would also reiterate that, under Bill C-5, changes were implemented to encourage alternative responses to simple possession.

Business of Supply

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, why then is the government resorting to failed policy, perhaps preferring political optics over saving lives?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I reject that categorization outright. We are responding in a manner that is commensurate with the requests that are being put before us.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Cowichan—Malahat—Langford asked this earlier. Twice the Liberal government has been asked, and twice it has not fully answered if and when it will meet the legal requirements to sequester the criminal records on simple possession of illicit drugs for more than 250,000 Canadians. The deadline is this November, and Canadians are rightly asking if they will be notified that their records have indeed been sequestered. These records for offences that are no longer offences in Canada under current laws impact people's ability to seek employment or housing and travel abroad to visit loved ones. These records also disproportionately impact indigenous and racialized Canadians, as well as those living in poverty.

Could the minister please inform the House how the government will meet the legal November deadline and inform impacted Canadians of how they can know that their criminal records have been sequestered?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, again, I share this member's and the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford's concerns about the disproportionate impacts of criminal policy on racialized and vulnerable communities, such as the indigenous community. As I have already indicated, the Minister of Public Safety is the lead minister in this regard. He is working on a collaborative basis and with an expeditious approach to work with his provincial and territorial partners to address the deadline. We are fully aware of the deadline, and the Minister of Public Safety is seized with the matter.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, the federal government controls who and how supervised consumption services are provided. These services remain unavailable in most locations across the country, especially in more rural and remote locations. This is despite the fact that we heard from the deputy commissioner of the RCMP and the B.C. chiefs of police, who say that we need more safe consumption sites, not fewer.

We only need to look at Lethbridge, which closed its safe consumption site and has one of the worst death rates in the country. It is triple the per capita death rate of British Columbia. Regina has a 65% higher death rate per capita than British Columbia and no safe consumption site.

When will the government get rid of the red tape and ensure that these services are available and funded nationally?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, with the utmost respect, I would just turn back the clock. When I was first elected to office, we were coming hot off the heels of a 9-0 decision of the Supreme Court of Canada against the Harper government for failing to authorize safe injection sites. That was in a case called *Insite*. What we did was reverse that entire pattern with a completely different philosophy and empower safe consumption sites to occur with an exemption under the Narcotics Control Act. That being said, once we have allowed them to occur, we would still need applications to come in

from provinces that want the sites in their localities. Some provinces want a few. Some want none at all. That is the collaborative nature of a federation, in terms of a shared jurisdiction over health that we must work within.

I appreciate the member's concerns, but I would ask him to express them to the provincial governments of Saskatchewan and Alberta, because that is where they are most appropriately vetted.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, they are not willing to do it. This is the problem. In Lethbridge, they closed them. People are dying. In Alberta, since the UCP took power, the Conservatives in Alberta, the death rate has gone up 276% over five years, the worst increase in toxic drug deaths by far. For the vast majority of doctors in Alberta able to prescribe safer supply, they are subject to a \$10,000-per-day fine if they are caught doing so. Frontline workers who supervise drug consumption and reverse overdoses without a provincial license are subject to the same fines. These penalties are deterring life-saving health care during a worsening overdose emergency.

Does the minister believe it is appropriate for Alberta to levy a \$10,000-per-day fine against people providing life-saving first aid by operating the formal overdose protection sites while this province shuts them down?

• (2310)

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I would reiterate that I share the hon. member's concerns about addressing the opioid crisis. That is why we have adopted a harm reduction approach. We do not believe in criminalizing health-related behaviour.

That being said, I do not control whether the Government of Saskatchewan or the Government of Alberta applies to Health Canada to seek an exemption under the Narcotics Control Act so they can operate a safe consumption site. That is not within my purview as Minister of Justice or within the federal government's purview.

What we can do is provide the tools to ensure that the approach is being taken, so we are having a safer supply, reducing the amount of fentanyl that is being used and saving people's lives. That is what we have tried to do since 2015 and what we will continue to try to do. Again, I would urge him to express these frustrations directly to the provincial governments with which he is concerned.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, the minister keeps saying it is a health issue, but it is still a criminal issue for people in Canada. He has to get this straight here. This is a case of the province implementing *de facto* criminalization of medical practices. It goes against the Canada Health Act.

When will the federal government step in and stop provincial intrusion on its jurisdiction to regulate controlled substances and supervised consumption sites?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I would reiterate, for the edification of the member, that, through Bill C-5, we adopted many aspects of the original private member's bill that was suggested by the member for Beaches—East York, such as aspects and approaches toward the issue of simple possession. That included diversion and alternative measures.

Those are concrete examples of how we are taking a different approach, which is more focused on harm reduction for the issue of narcotics and simple possession.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, the Nuchatlaht have cited that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act requires the federal government to make its laws consistent with UNDRIP.

How will the minister change parliamentary process and procedure, in the passing of laws through Parliament and the Senate, to include indigenous involvement and consent?

Right now, first nations can help draft laws and have input, but once it reaches the tabling of legislation and changes, there is no real role for first nations to consent to proposed changes through committee and final adoption.

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, the passage of the UNDRIP through Parliament was historic. It created an annual reporting requirement and changed fundamentally the way we do business as a government.

The important involvement of indigenous people at the development stages, including through co-development, of legislation that has an impact or has a potential to impact on their rights is significant, and I have seen that in the work I am doing. I have seen that across 25 other departments that are touched upon by the UN declaration act action plan, which has 181 different measures.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, the minister's predecessor, Mr. Lametti, invited consultations with nations with respect to jurisdiction over gaming. This remains an extremely live issue in British Columbia and for Nuchatlaht people.

In the context of the recognition of nations' inherent rights to self-government and with respect to the continued role of the province in the regulation of gaming activities on reserve, what is the position of the federal government with respect to creating a space for true indigenous gaming?

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, there are aspects that touch upon gaming in the UN declaration act action plan, and we stand by that action plan, which was co-developed with many different indigenous rights holders around the country.

At FPT meetings, we have discussed issues that relate to gaming and the fact that we need federal-provincial-territorial co-operation to address this pressing issue. It will remain on the agenda and in the action plan.

Mr. Gord Johns: Mr. Speaker, they are looking for the minister to take leadership on this.

In June 2021, the justice committee tabled a report about systemic racism in policing in Canada in response to the tragic death of Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations member Chantel Moore, who died at the hands of an Edmondston police officer during a wellness check.

Business of Supply

One of the core recommendations in the report was about the RCMP's Civilian Review and Complaints Commission. It recommended that it be required to include indigenous investigators and decision-makers, and that it ensure indigenous investigators are involved when the complaint involves indigenous peoples.

These are critical measures to allow for meaningful and engaged indigenous participation, and hold the RCMP accountable for wrongful, negligent, reckless or discriminatory behaviour toward indigenous people.

June 4 will mark the fourth anniversary of Chantel's death. A wellness check should never have resulted in her death at the hands of the police and at the barrel of a government-issued gun. Chantel's family and community are still waiting for justice.

Can the justice minister tell us what the status of this recommendation is, what he is doing with that report when it comes to systemic racism and policing, and how he is working with the Department of Public Safety to ensure that these clear recommendations are followed up upon and implemented?

• (2315)

Hon. Arif Virani: Mr. Speaker, I would say a number of things. In terms of the tragic death of that woman, that is an absolute tragedy that I feel extreme sympathy for. My heart goes out to her family.

In terms of a response, we are working on a number of fronts. We are working on reimagining how we do policing and what policing is as an essential service. That is something that is governed by the Minister of Public Safety, and he is working on that.

Second, we are addressing systemic racism. We are calling it out by name. We are addressing systemic racism in policing, including in the RCMP.

Third, what I am doing specifically is working on an indigenous justice strategy that is targeted at curing the vast overrepresentation of indigenous people in both our court system and justice system, and in our correction system. That will help with addressing some of the circumstances that led to that fatality, which should have been avoided and needs to be avoided going forward.

*Business of Supply**[Translation]*

The Speaker: It being 11:16 p.m., pursuant to an order made earlier today and Standing Order 81(4), all votes are deemed reported and the committee will now rise.

The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11:16 p.m.)

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