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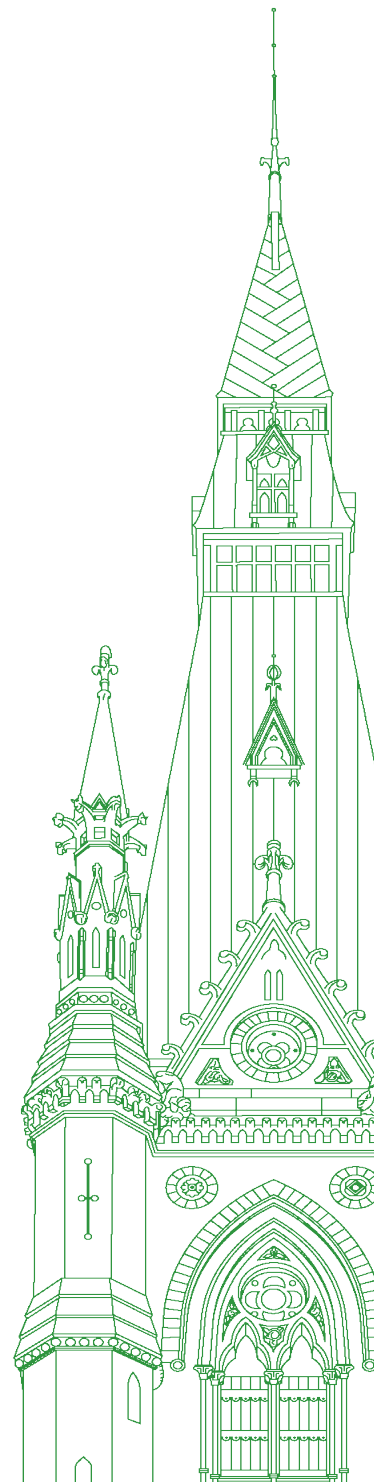
House of Commons Debates

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Friday, October 9, 2026

Speaker: The Honourable Francis Scarpaleggia



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, October 9, 2026

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1000)

[English]

FIRST NATIONS CLEAN WATER ACT

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty (Minister of Indigenous Services, Lib.) moved that Bill C-37, An Act respecting water, source water, drinking water, wastewater and related infrastructure on First Nation lands, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Madam Speaker, *waachiyeh, meesunuyeh, kwe, ulaakut, tansi* and hello. I rise today as a proud *eeyou iskwew* from the community of Waswanipi, and also as the Minister of Indigenous Services, to speak to Bill C-37, the first nations clean water act.

I understand first-hand the importance of protecting water in our communities, and I understand the impact of losing it. I grew up in a nation where water was never something to take for granted. Whenever we needed fresh water, I remember being sent with a small pot to collect it and bring it back to our camp. This was a communal responsibility, and carrying water for my grandmother was simply part of daily life. That water gave her what she needed to make sure that she was able to cook, clean and sometimes even bathe babies.

[Translation]

From that, I learned very early on that water is much more than a resource. It is something to respect, protect and take care of. It connects us to one another, to our families and to the earth.

[English]

That is why, as minister, ensuring access to clean and safe drinking water is one of my highest priorities. No parent should have to question whether the water coming from their tap is safe to drink. No child should have to grow up believing that clean water is something they may not have, yet for far too many families, this has been a reality for far too long in communities.

[Translation]

I am therefore rising today in support of Bill C-37, the first nations clean water act, which I had the honour of introducing earlier this year.

[English]

The bill before us would establish a lasting framework to protect and recognize first nations jurisdiction and ensure that the resources needed are there to sustain safe water for future generations.

[Translation]

The main purpose of this bill is to create an environment where children can safely drink tap water, where families can trust the quality of water in their homes and where communities get the opportunities they deserve.

[English]

To achieve the critical goal of Bill C-37, we are proposing a robust plan that empowers first nations with tools, authority and the support to protect water in their communities and build systems that are going to serve generations to come.

Across Canada, laws and regulations set strong minimum standards for drinking water, yet for far too long, first nations communities have been left without the same protections. That is unacceptable. Bill C-37 is designed to change that. It would establish a legislative framework with enforceable protections for safe drinking water that reflect first nations priorities. It would establish national principles and minimum standards. It would ensure that drinking water standards meet, at a minimum, the guidelines for Canadian drinking water quality.

The bill is about much more than setting standards. It is about protecting water, recognizing first nations authority, supporting communities and ensuring that governments are accountable for the work that must continue. Rights holders have been clear and have told us that communities know what they need and they should have the authority, tools and resources to protect the water that they depend on.

Bill C-37 would recognize and affirm that first nations' inherent right to self-government includes jurisdiction over water, source water, drinking water, waste water and related infrastructure in and under first nations lands.

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● (1005)

[Translation]

It also seeks to help first nations develop their own approaches to water governance based on the knowledge of elders, leaders, technicians, engineers and youth. This is a fundamental part of the bill.

This legislation establishes clear standards for safe drinking water, while recognizing that first nations must play a key role in decisions concerning water governance in their communities.

It gives first nations the tools they need to develop and enforce their own laws and to make decisions in the best interests of their members. This is what self-determination is all about.

[English]

The legislation would also establish lasting obligations. It would create accountability, clarify responsibility and bind future governments to the duty of working with first nations to advance access to clean water.

We know that there is more work to do. We are continuing to do that work with first nations, but we should also recognize what has been accomplished by first nations-led solutions. This progress has only been made possible with their involvement.

Together, we have lifted 157 long-term drinking water advisories. We have prevented more than 335 short-term advisories from becoming long-term. As a result of these lifts, more than 10,000 homes and over 700 community buildings, such as schools and health centres, now have access to clean drinking water. Today, nearly 80% of long-term drinking water advisories have been lifted, and this progress matters.

[Translation]

This progress means that children who were waiting for clean drinking water can now count on the water coming out of their taps and can have access to great things for the future in terms of the systems put in place for the community.

Our responsibility now is to build on that progress to eliminate the advisories that are still in place, prevent new advisories where possible and ensure that the systems we put in place today remain safe and reliable for generations to come.

However, 38 long-term water advisories remain in effect in 36 communities. It is a reminder that our work is not over. It is still ongoing. Despite the progress that has been made, we realize we still have 38 advisories too many. That confirms the need for sustained efforts and long-term solutions.

[English]

For many years, first nations have called for change. They have called for legislation that follows their direction and respects self-determination, legislation that recognizes their role as stewards of water, establishes clear standards and reflects the realities of their communities. Those calls have been steady and they have guided this work. Bill C-37 answers those calls.

Progress like this does not happen on its own. It requires sustained investment and partnership with first nations. In June, we were able to announce \$4.6 billion over five years to support water

and waste-water initiatives in first nations communities, the largest investment a Canadian government has ever made in first nations water. This builds on the additional \$2.3 billion provided in our government's budget announced in 2025, as well as the \$7.1 billion from 2015 to 2024.

So far with these investments, since I was appointed, we have supported more than 1,700 water and waste-water projects in nearly 600 communities, helping meet the needs of almost half a million people in this country. This funding will continue to build, operate, maintain and upgrade the systems that families rely on every single day.

● (1010)

[Translation]

These investments will also help support communities that are facing vastly different realities. Not all communities are starting from the same starting point. Communities need to be able to plan. They need to know that when they build infrastructure, they will have the necessary resources to maintain it.

[English]

Bill C-37 would commit the federal government to working with first nations to co-develop a long-term funding framework so that decisions about water and waste-water funding are not made in isolation from the communities that are affected by them. Every community has a different reality, and every family deserves a water system they can rely on.

The funding framework would also reflect the full picture of what communities need for safe drinking water. This includes infrastructure, operations, maintenance, operator training, retention, and the long-term supports needed for water systems and the people who must operate them every day. Communities know what they need, and Bill C-37 has been shaped and guided by the decisions they have made concerning water.

Safe drinking water does not just begin at the tap. It also begins at the source: in the rivers, lakes, wetlands and groundwater systems that first nations have been protecting since time immemorial.

*Government Orders**[Translation]*

For generations, first nations have known that protecting water is more than just an environmental responsibility. It is also a responsibility towards the community, culture and future generations. That is why Bill C-37 includes provisions to protect water sources by establishing protection zones that will be developed jointly with first nations, the provinces, the territories and federal partners.

[English]

Through the pathway to mutually agreed upon protection zones set out in this legislation, first nations, provinces, territories and the federal government would work together to protect critical shared water resources. The bill also affirms that the first nations' inherent right to self-government includes jurisdiction to protect water in and under their lands.

[Translation]

I would also like to make one thing clear: Passing this bill does not mean that drinking water advisories will become a thing of the past. Water systems are dynamic. Infrastructure ages. Weather events happen. Climate change is affecting communities across the country, and unforeseen challenges can arise, even in the best-managed systems.

This bill establishes a more robust legislative framework to address these challenges. It fosters continuous improvement, strengthens partnerships, provides more predictable funding and clarifies responsibilities, ensuring that communities have the resources they need to resolve problems quickly and can take the necessary steps to serve the best interests of their members.

[English]

This legislation reflects Canada's commitment to realizing the human right to safe drinking water on first nations lands. This commitment means taking action and making concrete steps to improve access to safe and clean drinking water on first nations lands.

As I mentioned before, not every community is starting from the same place. Many communities have strong systems in place, while others face greater infrastructure capacity needs and operational challenges and need necessary support. Bill C-37 recognizes all those different realities. It would help communities move forward from where they are today and would support long-term progress toward safe and reliable drinking water. This is our government's commitment through this legislation, and it is an obligation we will pass on to all future governments.

Bill C-37 also proposes the creation of a first nations-led water commission. This commission would serve as a centre of expertise to support and implement the act. Its mandate, structure and services would be defined by first nations. Across the country, first nations are already leading in water stewardship. Water operators, technicians and community leaders are protecting source water, operating systems, restoring watersheds and sharing knowledge with the next generation. This bill would recognize that leadership and build on it.

● (1015)

[Translation]

The proposed water commission aligns with that approach. The commission would be a first nations-led centre of expertise where communities can share knowledge, technical advice and best practices. Bill C-37 will help strengthen this resource so that communities can continue to support one another for many years to come.

[English]

First nations leadership across the country has shared their stories with me about water since my appointment. These stories are of persistence, leadership and hope.

[Translation]

I cannot help but think of those communities, where families have lived under boil water advisories for years. Access to safe drinking water will depend entirely on the work we do together.

[English]

I think of children who grow up without knowing what it means to simply turn on the tap and drink. I think of that moment when change happens: when a parent no longer has to question the water, a grandmother can fill the kettle without hesitation and a child can drink freely from the tap. That is what progress looks like, and that is what we are working towards.

I think of Northwest Angle No. 33 first nation in Ontario, where families lived for 12 years under a boil water advisory that was finally lifted, and where the return of safe water meant trusting the tap again in daily life.

I think of Bonaparte First Nation in British Columbia, where children who have never known anything else could finally drink from the tap after more than 14 years.

I think of Star Blanket Cree Nation in Saskatchewan, whose dedication and commitment to providing clean and safe drinking water helped lift a boil water advisory that had been in place since 2007. The opening of a new water treatment plant brought a 17-year advisory to an end, marking a meaningful milestone for the community.

This legislation reflects more than six years of consultation and engagement with first nations leaders, technicians, water operators and communities across the country. It carries forward what first nations have told us, which is that solutions must be built together.

*Government Orders**[Translation]*

We have made real progress since 2015, including lifting 156 long-term boil water advisories, preventing more than 335 further advisories from becoming long-term advisories, and supporting over 1,700 projects in nearly 600 communities. We still have a lot of work to do, and we need to get started right away.

[English]

I believe we have an opportunity before us today. We have an opportunity to close the long-standing legislative gap, to recognize first nations jurisdiction over water and to strengthen source water protection. It is also an opportunity to create accountability in a sustainable funding framework. It is an opportunity to strengthen first nations-led governance and put historic resources to work for them.

I am here to work with and for first nations that want to build this reality together. My journey as a mother, a leader and a member of my nation has shown me that real progress comes from doing things right, building trust, sharing responsibility and listening to the voices that guide our work and turning it into action. Today we have the opportunity to do exactly that. I ask all members of the House to support Bill C-37.

[Translation]

We need to move this bill forward and continue to work in partnership with first nations.

[English]

Let us build a future where every child and community can turn on the tap with confidence, and where every first nations community has the authority, resources and protections it needs to sustain clean, safe and reliable drinking water.

• (1020)

Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to recognize the minister's work on the file. It is a very difficult file.

She referenced the work that has been done by the Liberal government since 2015. I have a quick comment about the work done by government. In the House, just this week, when asked about affordability, the Prime Minister said, "I just got here."

In 2015, the Liberals promised to end boiled water advisories. The fact is that they did not just get here. I am wondering if the minister can confirm, yes or no, if they are going to keep their promise to end boil water advisories.

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty: Madam Speaker, the objective of this law is to do that.

I want to remind my colleague that it is the Liberal government that put forward this promise. We have done intense capital project planning, invested in community, lifted a number of boil water advisories and prevented a number of boil water advisories. Now we seek to target the 38 remaining boil water advisories.

I hope that my colleague will vote for the bill so that the communities waiting for this will be able to complete the remaining work.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, *waachiyaah*.

I want to thank my colleague and riding neighbour, more commonly known as the Minister of Indigenous Services, for her intervention.

First nations have waited a very long time for this bill. I would even go so far as to say that we literally lost a year waiting during this Parliament. At the time, there was broad consensus around Bill C-61, co-developed with first nations. The committee was very thorough in its work and proposed a number of amendments, all in collaboration with groups representing first nations.

My question for the minister is simple: What has changed between Bill C-61 and Bill C-37, which is before us today, that accounts for the year we have just lost?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty: Madam Speaker, I took the time to study things and speak with the communities.

One very important aspect of this bill is the government's historic investment to ensure that the communities benefiting from this bill have all the essentials, including funds to invest in the work involved in lifting boil water advisories.

[English]

Karim Bardeesy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in Taiaiko'n—Parkdale—High Park in west Toronto, we are beneficiaries of having clean, abundant and affordable drinking water provided through the City of Toronto and municipal public services, yet in my riding, there are many people who are concerned about the situation with first nations drinking water. I think they will receive this bill with a lot of jubilation.

Could the minister describe how the measures in this bill would equal the playing field so that residents of first nations and on reserves can benefit from the kind of drinking water that most of us in cities take for granted?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty: Madam Speaker, Bill C-37 is seeking, first and foremost, to establish the minimum standards that are in place for many residents in ridings that are not first nations communities. This is the base. If first nations communities want to do the additional work to define what that standard should be for them, they are able to do that, and we would support them through Bill C-37.

Billy Morin: Madam Speaker, the government appealed a 2025 ruling against it when it came to its failures on first nations clean drinking water.

The Liberals immediately appealed the decision. Can the minister explain why they appealed and why they are still fighting first nations in court regarding clean drinking water in first nations?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty: Madam Speaker, I want to inform my colleague that, in government, we have to do the work of responding and ensuring that the government fully represents all of the positions that are presented to it, and while we do this incredible work, we are also making decisions to ensure that the historic investment that we have put forward in this space will meet their needs.

Every community that has met with me this year has spoken to me about how they want to undertake this work. They support this position, and I hope that my colleague will make sure that he creates that pathway alongside me to be sure that we can offer them those tools.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: Madam Speaker, I just want to remind the House of the leadership shown by the former minister of indigenous services, the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, on this issue. She held consultations to build a strong consensus among the parties.

From what I understand from the answer that the minister just gave us, the only difference between Bill C-61 and Bill C-37 is that more money is going to be invested. That is not true. Unfortunately, that is a bogus excuse. The Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador, Francis Verreault-Paul, is of the opinion that Bill C-37 no longer explicitly recognizes access to drinking water as a human right, a right recognized by the United Nations, and that some aspects of the bill represent a step backward compared to Bill C-61.

My question is simple. What has the minister backtracked on?

• (1025)

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty: Madam Speaker, this bill is the result of six years of work by the first nations themselves. The information was provided by the communities themselves. I really took the time to study all of the evidence presented and to talk to many people who are affected by the current advisories.

One of the things my colleague really needs to try to understand is that the gradual implementation of the right to access drinking water is set out in the legislation. This gives the communities the opportunity to say where they want to start and present their situation. The government will work with them to establish a water system, infrastructure and a plan that can be shared with the members of each first nation, each community, in a way that respects their circumstances.

[English]

Ellis Ross (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to reaffirm a question, which my colleague asked previously, and its answer, because this is a big, shiny announcement.

As a first nations leader, I have seen big, shiny announcements over the last 20 years, but I think it is important that Canadians and aboriginals understand that, underneath this shiny announcement, the Canadian government, the Liberal government, is actually los-

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ing court cases regarding drinking water on reserves. At the same time, the government is appealing the decisions that it has lost.

Can the minister explain why the government is appealing the latest decision it lost?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty: Madam Speaker, I want to remind my colleague that, while he speaks of big, shiny announcements, there are 38 communities waiting for this work to be done, such as Kashechewan, which this year had to evacuate because of major infiltration in its water system.

There are communities hoping to do this work, and they need this valuable resource. We are working on this law in partnership with those very communities. They are waiting for the resource to be sure that their members, the children who play on their streets, can go home, turn on the tap and drink a glass of water. That is what is important. That is what we are delivering with the work we have done here.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like the minister to provide her thoughts on Shoal Lake No. 40 first nation, which is located on Treaty 3 land.

Over generations now, in the city of Winnipeg, we have had fresh, clear, clean water supplied to the residents. Water management has been at the core for first nations. This is one of the ways that we recognize the whole issue of valuing our natural resources and the important role indigenous people play. It is a part of reconciliation. Could the minister provide her thoughts on that?

Hon. Mandy Gull-Masty: Madam Speaker, we have to take into consideration that the work we do here is not only about water system infrastructure but also about giving communities the power, the resource and the jurisdiction over deciding how they are going to access that. It is not only about how they are doing the work to harmonize their relationship with their environment, protect necessary resources and practise their indigenous way of life to be able to provide a service in community, but also about ensuring that we give them the resources to be successful in that space.

Manitoba has been one of the provinces where we have seen an immense need. It is the same thing in northern Ontario. We have many communities across the country that are waiting for the resource in this bill to action and service their members.

• (1030)

Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent to split my time with the member for Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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Billy Morin: Madam Speaker, the Liberals said no relationship is more important to Canada than the one with indigenous peoples. On October 2015, the Liberal government promised to end boil water advisories on first nations by March 31, 2021, which was in approximately 2,000 days or six years. Like so many things with reconciliation, the Liberals never lived up to their word. Since their deadline came and passed, an additional 2,018 days, or nearly six years, have come and gone. Now it has been over 11 years, over 4,000 days, since they promised to deal with clean water on first nations. There are still boil water advisories on first nations. There are still first nations wondering when the Liberals will live up to their word.

The Minister, on behalf of the Government of Canada, must fulfill Canada's obligations and implement Canada's commitments set out in the Settlement Agreement,

I highlight the words "settlement agreement", which of course refers to a 2021 class action lawsuit regarding first nations' clean drinking water, a lawsuit started in 2019 by several first nations that were, and still are, tired of the government's negligence on water.

This legislation is not derived from Liberal government leadership to do right by first nations people or water, but by the first nations seeing no other alternative but to take the government to court and force action for clean drinking water. Again, that is not the end of this. As we note today, the Liberal government continues to fight first nations in court to deny Canada has a legal duty to ensure they have safe drinking water on reserve, even as the Liberals advance this legislation. Shamattawa First Nation v. Canada was launched in court in 2022. The outstanding action by first nations is still arguing in court to this day that the government still fails in its obligations to provide safe drinking water.

After failing to pass clean water legislation last Parliament as a priority, their third as the government, for the third consecutive time, it took the Liberals over a year on the last day before summer break to reintroduce their clean water legislation, much of it basically the same as Bill C-61, their previous bill in the last Parliament. That is how the Liberals treat what is, according to them, their most important relationship in the country. That is the Liberal record on reconciliation. I ask them, is this the Liberal way of keeping their word?

Let us also not forget why this legislation is here in the first place. It talks about it right in the legislation itself. Section 33 of this bill says:

It is no wonder that first nations like Shamattawa, St. Theresa and others in rural northern Manitoba feel they have no other option but to fight in court. Since April 2025, at the same time that the Liberal government was re-elected, those nations have been devastated from an ongoing hepatitis A outbreak, exacerbated by long-standing challenges such as a lack of clean drinking water, adequate sewage and plumbing systems.

In 2025, the court sided with those first nations and the Liberals immediately appealed and are still fighting first nations in court today over clean, safe drinking water. In the appeal filing, the Liberal defence via government lawyers denied that first nations have distinctly indigenous interest in the drinking water. They asserted that first nations' interest in their own reserve land does not include wa-

ter because water is not attached to the land, but flows around it and under it. I am not sure what to make of that argument.

The draft of the Liberals' Bill C-37, which we are discussing here today, in section 6 says, "jurisdiction of First Nations...[is recognized over] water, source water, drinking water, wastewater, related infrastructure on, in and under First Nation lands." The Liberals propose to recognize first nations jurisdiction in and under first nations lands, but are in court at this moment saying first nations' interest does not include water on their land because it is not attached to the land.

Where are the principles of the government? At what point are the Liberals going to put in the real work to do right by first nations and clean drinking water? They should stop going around in circles wasting money on endless conflicting dialogues. They should stop fighting in court and go beyond the bare minimum ordered by that court to have kids and families gain access to life's basic necessity.

What does this legislation actually do? How will it lead to them keeping their promise and how will it get the kids and families that life-giving necessity? How will it help end a boil water advisory for Neskantaga, which has been under a boil water advisory now for 30-plus years? Entire generations of a community know no reality of what it means to turn on a tap and drink safely.

● (1035)

First, this bill says that first nations should have substantive equality, which means they should have the same accessibility to clean, safe drinking water as non-first nations communities. That is a good thing, but when you consider the policies that Indigenous Services Canada has implemented today, those policies already acknowledge that Health Canada standards, such as for effluent quality and waste-water treatment, and federal guidelines for Canadian drinking water quality apply. Will turning a policy into legislation regarding standards actually change anything the government is doing? No. As many first nations leaders have said already regarding this bill, it is a watered-down version of the previous legislation that says it will make best efforts to do the bare minimum. After 11 years, this is the best the Liberals can do to an already long-time policy and say it is now legislation.

Next, this legislation has the government's favourite word to give first nations to imply the government is actually doing something when it is really not. It is "framework". First nations wanted to be empowered yesterday on upskilling more clean water and wastewater operators. They want to know their new and old systems will be adequately supported by the fiduciary responsibility of the government. They want to know if they can enforce accountability in the system. Remote communities want to build faster and more effectively. They want testing capacity. They want adequate, predictable funding beyond two-year ISC contribution agreements and/or beyond one government budget cycle. In the case of northern Manitoba rural first nations, they want things in place to stop a hepatitis A outbreak. A framework does not do that. Kids and families cannot drink or bathe in frameworks. Saying a policy is now legislation will do nothing to stop their hepatitis A outbreak.

Finally, the government told first nations and Canadians it is committed to meaningfully implementing UNDRIP, including the aspects of clean water. Evidence shows that, just like its promise in 2015, this was all just political talk with no real intention of ever living up to its word. When it comes to Liberals keeping their promises of ending boil water advisories, this legislation now says the government will make best efforts. When it comes to implementing UNDRIP, this legislation now says it is "guided by", key words distinctly different from "according to our direct implementation record". This reflects their 2026 report on the implementation of UNDRIP, Bill C-15, where the government said it would make all laws compatible with UNDRIP. With its fifth report, which was just released a few months ago, we now know that 125 of 181 action plan items the government developed alongside a handful of just a few first nations people are either paused, not started or incomplete. The Liberals know they say UNDRIP just because they think it is politically convenient and advantageous to say so, but their rhetoric is catching up to them, and it is becoming more divisive, especially in B.C., for all Canadians.

Take, for instance, the funding announced. This is not statutory funding, by the way, as part of this legislation. The Liberals announced this alongside the bill as part of the budget. The minister said it was the largest historic investment in water, but the immediate reaction of first nations was that they had heard this before, in fact a number of times. How many consultants who exploit first nations have been made rich off these Liberal money announcements while families on reserve go without? What the Liberals do not seem to understand is that it is not just about a podium announcement, consultations or money contributed. First nations are focused on the results and accountability. First nations are no longer judging the government by its fake photo ops and announcements. As Chief Mercredi warned them last week, first nations leaders at announcements does not mean a vote of confidence.

I will come full circle. I stand here speaking not for all first nations, but as one first nations person in this House holding the government accountable. My voice reflects the disappointment, frustration and lack of hope many first nations feel regarding the Liberal government on its record on reconciliation and water. Conservatives believe first nations deserve respect, clean drinking water and a government that keeps its word. Too much time has passed. There are still crises 30 years old regarding water. Despite the shortcomings of this bill, we would like to see it get through this House to

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the next stage at committee, where first nations voices again will help us keep the government accountable.

[Translation]

Tim Watchorn (Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague opposite gave a very heartfelt speech. It is obvious that he really cares about this issue.

In my previous life, I had the opportunity to manage drinking water plants and sewage treatment plants for the towns of Saint-Adèle and Saint-Sauveur, so I am very familiar with the mechanisms for boil water advisories and safe drinking water practices. What I see in Bill C-37 is a major investment of \$4.6 billion over five years to help first nations achieve the drinking water quality and standards that everyone should have.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on how this money should be invested properly in these communities in order to lift the boil water advisories that have been in place for far too long.

● (1040)

[English]

Billy Morin: Madam Speaker, this bill is, as first nations leaders have said, the bare minimum. The Liberals are going to take best efforts to do the bare minimum, and it is a watered-down version of Bill C-61. When the member talks about standards, those standards already exist in the policies implemented.

When it comes to the funds, the Liberals announced big funding. For the first nations, the funding announcements and the billions of dollars go over their heads because they are still suffering from water shortages, hepatitis A outbreaks and kids and families going without. When it comes to money, I would like to see the government be more accountable. Maybe this legislation could be more empowered to keep the government accountable to taxpayers, to first nations and to those kids and families who are suffering the most.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, *meegwetch* to the member for Edmonton Northwest. It was refreshing to have him here and at the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs, where I had the chance to sit with him for a little while.

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Let us talk about Bill C-37. Obviously, a great deal of work had been done on Bill C-61, yet what we are seeing now is a step backward on the part of the government. All things considered, I find there is something naive about the government telling us it is going to provide funding. How does my colleague view this naivety? Does he feel that we have lost a year, a year during which those funds could have been invested in concrete solutions for first nations and in building the expertise and workforce needed to properly manage drinking water systems?

Should it also not have taken years and years of reports from the Auditor General, over the course of virtually decades, before this government's failure to fulfill its responsibilities regarding safe drinking water for first nations was finally called into question? I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that.

[English]

Billy Morin: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his great work when I sat with him at INAN. It has been frustrating to watch the last year, but it has been 10 times even more frustrating watching the last 10 years of the Liberal government. It is promise after promise broken, and at this point, I do not blame any first nation for being cynical, sad or disappointed when it comes to its record on water.

This legislation talks again about a framework, and it says in there that the government is going to take another year, and it is probably going to be two more years or three more years given its record on implementing actual frameworks and actual details to change the system and get things built.

At this point, the bare minimum, a watered-down version of Bill C-61, does not inspire a lot of hope going forward for first nations families or kids at all.

Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, it has always a pleasure to work with my hon. colleague. In the legislation, it defines first nations lands as not including “lands over which Aboriginal title is claimed by a First Nation or has been confirmed by a court.”

We know industry is set up by first nations. We also know the legislation would not give first nations jurisdiction over source water and aquifers, therefore limiting our jurisdiction to Indian Act reserve boundaries only.

I am wondering if my colleague can share the Conservative position on the failure of the government to even uphold court rulings in relation to this bill.

Billy Morin: Madam Speaker, the Conservative position is that we want to give first nations and all Canadians a government that is truthful and delivers on what it says. Regarding major projects, there was an announcement yesterday by a first nation that it had asked for a review on the latest announcement regarding a pipeline. I do not blame that first nation, but what this really says to me is that the Liberals' record on rhetoric, on promises they cannot keep and on photo op announcements that have no substance beyond them is really catching up to them, and it is dividing this country. Conservatives do not believe in that. We believe in an honest, straightforward conversation. We believe we should disagree when

we have to and show respect. The Liberal government is really setting reconciliation back now many years.

● (1045)

Jeff Kibble (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the great people of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford on beautiful Vancouver Island: seniors, families, fishers, workers, youth, business owners and Cowichan Tribes, the largest first nation in British Columbia.

Before I turn to Bill C-37, I would like to take a moment to pay my respects to Mr. Bob Saunders, who, sadly, passed away just a few days ago at the age of 91. Across Vancouver Island and beyond, Bob gave without counting, to health care, veterans, mental health education, youth, and community services. As a runner for the Wounded Warrior Run BC team, I personally saw his generosity as he supported our fundraising efforts for those who carried the weight of service. He gave not just in dollars but also with hope, dignity and leadership. Bob inspired me and so many others across British Columbia. Through his generosity, his kindness and his philanthropy, he showed the very best of what it means to be Canadian.

Not long ago, I had the honour of joining Bob and his beloved wife, Norma, at the Victoria Shamrocks' season opener as Bob and Norma celebrated 70 years of marriage. His son Dave has closely followed in his father's footsteps with the same kindness, generosity and commitment to our communities. What Dave gives to Vancouver Island is not a copy of his father's work; it is a continuation of it. My and Angel's thoughts and prayers are with Dave and the entire Saunders family today, and to the late Bob Saunders I wish fair winds and following seas.

I now turn to the business at hand of Bill C-37, the first nations clean water act. Clean water is a necessity of life, not a privilege and not a favour. Let me start with this: Conservatives have always supported clean, safe, reliable water for first nations, and we support sending the bill to committee for key amendments to make it stronger. Support is not a blank cheque but a promise to do the work of making the bill better.

Let me begin with what the bill would do. It would affirm first nation jurisdiction over water on first nation lands. It would set minimum standards for water quality, quantity and waste water, and it would create a first nation-led water commission.

However, let us look closely at what this commission could actually do. It could advise. It could support capacity building. It could help first nations develop their own water laws. What it could not do is order a cleanup. It could not compel a polluter. It could not force a federal department to act, even when contamination is already creeping towards first nations' water that families rely on. A commission with no enforcement power is a resource, not a remedy.

Bill C-37 would also rely again and again on two words: best efforts. With a binding obligation, says the government, it must take action, but with best efforts, says the government, it only has to try. Families cannot drink best efforts.

Let me show the House what the difference looks like on Vancouver Island. The Cowichan River begins at Cowichan Lake, winds lazily through the town of Lake Cowichan, through the forests over Skutz Falls and into the fertile farmland of the Cowichan Valley, then through Duncan and the Cowichan Tribes reserve lands, past the Cowichan River hatchery before it empties into the ocean at Cowichan Bay. It is not one community's river. It is the backbone of a whole valley. It is drinking water. It is fisheries. It is farms. It is identity.

For Cowichan Tribes, the river and its salmon are also central to food, culture and ceremony. Since 1978, Cowichan Tribes and Fisheries and Oceans Canada have successfully partnered on a hatchery to rebuild the river's salmon. In a statement, Cowichan Tribes called pollution and contamination of reserve land and water a "national problem." They said the tools to address it are "primarily under federal jurisdiction" and that "the Government of Canada [has been] reluctant to prosecute polluters."

Let us explore that statement. On reserve land, along that same river, on Indian Road, sits what looks like, at first glance, a pile of waste. It is not the only illegal dump site in the Cowichan Valley, and it will not be the only one I raise in the House, but this site is unambiguously on federal land and is federal responsibility, and that is why I am turning my efforts to it first. However, it is not a pile. A 2023 consultant's report put its volume at more than 290,000 cubic metres accumulated over two decades. It is not a dump; it is a mountain. Government and consultant reports list what is in it: heavy metals, including arsenic, cadmium, lead and zinc; hydrocarbons; volatile organic compounds; small amounts of asbestos; and lead-based paint. The list goes on.

● (1050)

The reports found that the site is producing leachate that is moving through the groundwater, creeping toward the river. Testing continues. Separately it has been reported that contamination may now also be present in the Cowichan River itself. Though this has only been reported, a river this important should not have to wait for proof of harm before the government takes action. Cowichan Tribes says it has asked for action since 2010.

The site sits on reserve land but, importantly, outside the nation's land code. Under law, that makes this a clear federal responsibility. It is not a grey area, not a shared file and not a matter for another order of government to resolve. It is Ottawa's duty and Ottawa's duty alone. In April, I wrote to the Minister of Indigenous Services,

Government Orders

but despite years of warning, meaningful federal enforcement and remediation of this water travesty have not materialized.

Many people bear responsibility for how this site came to be: those who illegally dumped, those who profited and those who turned a blind eye. I am not here to point fingers today. I am here to have the illegal garbage dump and the contaminants that are impacting the river and the groundwater remediated and cleaned up, and to compel the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations to take action. I will always fight for the people of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford.

A consultant's 2023 estimate was \$5.3 million to move the waste or \$2 million to cap it, and those costs have only risen since. Turning back to Bill C-37, let us consider the money behind this bill. The 2021 settlement agreement promised a one-time, \$6-billion amount to achieve safe drinking water access by March 2030. That is construction money with a deadline.

However, the bill would not replenish that. It would not guarantee what comes after. There is no statutory commitment to the ongoing operating funding that keeps a treatment plant running or cleanup of an illegal garbage dump moving once the announcements are made and the cameras leave. Best efforts, as is repeatedly said, will not clean up this site. The people of Cowichan Tribes and the Cowichan Valley deserve better.

Let me now look at what the bill would offer for a case like this. It mentions cleanup of source water in one place, as some regulations may address. Protection zones beside the reserve would not be defined until those regulations are made, and they would require the province and Canada to agree. The minister's duty on environmental protection is to consult, to co-operate and to achieve results. The bill would not come into force until one year after royal assent, and the minister would only have to make best efforts to begin consulting on the regulations six months after that. The Assembly of First Nations has raised weak source-water protection, lack of sustainable funding and other challenges with the bill.

It is my duty, as a member of the House, to hold the government to account, but that duty is not an end in itself. It means to make a bill better, one worthy of the people of Cowichan—Malahat—Langford and every community the bill is meant to serve.

Government Orders

With that duty in mind, I offer the following. First, replace best efforts with binding, measurable duties. Second, have a public federal plan with timelines to remediate issues such as the illegal garbage dump and its pollution into the groundwater and other similar sites. Third, provide not only stable operating funding that is set up but construction funding as well. Fourth, there should be regulations that come back to the House so Parliament can see the details and not just the promises.

I offer these in the spirit of working with government, with Cowichan Tribes and with every community on Vancouver Island that depends on clean water. This matters on the island, it matters across B.C. and it matters across Canada. The Cowichan River, Cowichan Valley, Cowichan hatchery rebuilding the salmon stocks, and Cowichan Tribes all deserve a federal government that acts.

I support sending the bill to committee. Let us collaborate and work to make it worthy of the people it serves.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am glad to hear that the member supports the legislation and wants it to go to committee. That is a very positive gesture.

The government, I believe, has great intent of looking at an issue that has been an issue for generations now. I can recall, even when I was an MLA, the water advisories in the province of Manitoba. I believe there is a lot of good public will for more action. Our Prime Minister, newly elected less than a year and a half ago, has brought forward substantive legislation. I believe we are moving in the right direction.

Could the member provide his thoughts in regard to having the bill go to committee sooner as opposed to later?

• (1055)

Jeff Kibble: Madam Speaker, the member said “great intent”. Unfortunately, great intent does not bring results. We have seen with Bill C-61 that there has been a lack of results, so I look forward to the committee's working with Bill C-37 to this time collaborate and finally get some results.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for sincerely standing up for his constituents, particularly those in indigenous communities.

The Liberal Party, which forms the government, has waited decades before taking action, despite successive reports from the Auditor General. It has allowed disputes with first nations, who have been calling for this right, to drag on for decades. I would remind members that the Auditor General said that, in 2021, there were still 60 boil water advisories in effect in first nations communities. Today, we are happy to hear that, in 2025, that number has gone down to 35. There has been some progress. However, some people have been affected by this for decades.

Now the government is saying that this is great and that it will be able to fix the problem. However, it is mainly the Liberal government's lack of action that led to this situation, particularly when it

comes to health, and which is affecting the quality of life of generations of first nations members who live in these communities.

Can my colleague tell us whether this delay is justified?

[English]

Jeff Kibble: Madam Speaker, I agree that there has been a lack of action. The Liberals have waited for decades. We have had announcements without results, with respect not only to this bill but so many others also. Therefore, I am calling on the Liberals to collaborate with and take input from the Conservatives so we can get results. They need to work with the Conservatives so we can strengthen the bill and finally have results.

Ellis Ross (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, CPC): Madam Speaker, first nations Canadians should know that this is the track record of the Liberal government. It promised to put in a framework to do something in the future, and the first nations leaders, including me, have heard this so many times before. First nations leaders and Canadians should understand that it is a great speech from the Liberal government, and a great bill, so it says, but in the meantime, it is opposing first nations in court that want to have clean drinking water in their communities. It is appealing decisions that it lost in court.

Does my colleague have an opinion on the doublespeak the Liberal government is employing against clean drinking water?

Jeff Kibble: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his sound advice on so many first nations-related issues. He speaks of a track record that not only applies to this bill but also seems to have been common throughout so many Liberal bills over 11 years. Therefore, I am calling on the minister to clean up the illegal garbage dump that is contaminating the water in the Cowichan River, and help the Cowichan people. Let us finally have some action.

Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, the reality is that the Conservatives did a mass disinformation campaign around aboriginal title in the Cowichan case, saying that it threatened property owners. We know that the bill would not recognize aboriginal title and that industry has set up outside reserves, which will totally erode the protection of clean drinking water for the Cowichan tribes. Can the hon. member answer to that?

Jeff Kibble: Madam Speaker, to be frank, aboriginal title still has to go to the B.C. Supreme Court.

With respect to industry setting up outside reserve lands, absolutely that needs to be incorporated at committee to consider that factor.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1100)

[English]

FILIPINO CULTURAL CENTRE

Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Filipino Canadian community in British Columbia has worked for decades to make a permanent Filipino cultural centre a reality. Today, that goal is closer than ever. This week, New Democrat Premier David Eby pledged \$15 million to help make this dream come true. The community has led, and British Columbia has stepped up.

For 18 years, I have championed this worthy project in Parliament. As NDP finance critic, I recently secured a budget commitment to provide federal support. It is now time for the federal government to follow through and provide the funding needed to finally break ground.

Filipino Canadians enrich our country every day through their hard work, talents and generosity. Their contributions build Canada economically, socially and culturally, and they deeply strengthen the fabric of our nation. They deserve a public place to gather, celebrate their heritage and pass it on to future generations, and they deserve it now.

Mabuhay, Filipino cultural centre.

* * *

NATIONAL SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAM

Gurbux Saini (Fleetwood—Port Kells, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as students across Canada return to their classrooms this fall, I would like to wish all students, teachers and school staff a successful and rewarding school year.

Our government's national school food program is an important investment in our children and their future. This year, it will help provide nutritional meals to up to 400,000 more children. Thanks to the increased federal investment, more than 10,000 schools across Canada are now offering school food programs, and participating families with two children in school could save an estimated \$800 annually on grocery bills. By helping students stay healthy and focused, we are giving every child a better opportunity to succeed.

* * *

WINE INDUSTRY

Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls—Niagara-on-the-Lake, CPC): Madam Speaker, in a time of uncertainty and new challenges from President Trump's latest ban on Canadian wine, beer and spirits, Canada's wine industry needs assurance that the Government of Canada is doing everything it can to support it.

Sadly, the Liberals still have not renewed the vitally important wine sector support program, which is needed now more than ever. Conservatives are also calling on the government to immediately pause the federal excise tax on alcohol and to suspend the escalator tax, which continues to increase the cost for Canadian producers and consumers.

Statements by Members

The government should also quickly adopt my Conservative colleague's Bill C-262, which would allow Canadians to purchase Canadian beer, wine and spirits from anywhere in this country through Canada Post. It simply makes common sense. If trade barriers are going to be put up abroad, we need to be tearing them down here at home. Canadian wineries and grape growers need our federal support more than ever.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD

Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as we approach October 11, the International Day of the Girl Child, we must remember the devastating impact of armed conflict on girls and women around the world.

UNICEF estimates that more than 473 million children live in conflict-affected areas. Girls in these countries are nearly two and a half times more likely to be out of school. They face sexual violence, trafficking, forced marriage and displacement, often without essential supports.

However, girls are not simply victims. They are courageous individuals, leaders and agents of peace.

[Translation]

Canada's international development policy must protect these girls, support their education, help survivors and ensure their voices are heard during peace processes.

On this International Day of the Girl Child, their rights, safety and dreams must remain a priority.

* * *

[English]

STARS AIR AMBULANCE

Chris Warkentin (Grande Prairie, CPC): Madam Speaker, STARS air ambulance saves lives. For 20 years, the pilots, paramedics and ground crews of the Grande Prairie base have stood ready to act when lives hang in the balance and mere seconds mean the difference between life and death.

STARS exists in Grande Prairie because of the enduring generosity of local people. Last week, the STARS gala raised over half a million dollars from the local community to support this life-saving work.

Statements by Members

I have been proud to stand with STARS since it first launched 20 years ago. I always thank the crews and the donors on behalf of the lives that have been saved and the loved ones who can still hold them close. I also thank them on behalf of future patients, who currently have no clue that they will desperately need STARS someday soon. On their worst day, they will see that red chopper approaching and know that there is still hope.

On behalf of my family, our community and the region, I want to thank the STARS staff, donors and volunteers who ensure that there is always help coming when people need it the most.

* * *

● (1105)

[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER DAY

Jacques Ramsay (La Prairie—Atateken, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today to mark international developmental language disorder day, or DLDday, which is taking place next Friday.

DLD was once known as dysphasia, and despite the fact that it affects 7.5% of the Canadian population, it remains misunderstood. It is characterized by persistent difficulties in acquiring and using spoken and written language in relation to sounds, grammar and vocabulary. It is also often associated with other comorbidities, such as attention deficit disorder and impaired fine motor skills.

All too often, those affected are mistakenly regarded as incapable or insubordinate, which obviously has an impact on their self-esteem, education and work. That is why many of us in the House today are wearing the yellow and purple ribbon of Quebec's DLD advocacy group, Regroupement TDL Québec.

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QUEBEC ELECTION

Joël Godin (Saint-Augustin—Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, the riding of Saint-Augustin—Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier comprises four constituencies in the National Assembly. On Monday, Quebecers exercised their right to vote.

I would like to congratulate the new member for La Peltrie, Maïté Blanchette Vézina, as well as new members Karim Elayoubi, for Chauveau; Marcos Archambault, for Louis-Hébert; and Marcel Bouchard, for Portneuf. Representing constituents is both a privilege and a responsibility. I would like to wish them every success and assure them of my full co-operation.

I would also like to thank the outgoing members of the National Assembly, Éric Caire, Sylvain Lévesque, Geneviève Guilbault and Vincent Caron, for their service over the past several years. Their commitment to serving our society deserves our respect and gratitude. I thank them for their dedication and their contribution.

I would also like to acknowledge the 24 candidates who stood for election. Democracy has spoken. Let us now work together to serve our communities and keep the interests of our citizens at the forefront of everything we do.

[English]

ISRAEL

Anthony Housefather (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, this weekend the U.K. Green Party adopted a motion declaring itself anti-Zionist, calling Zionism “racism” and calling for the dismantling of the state of Israel. Zionism is simply the belief that the Jewish people have a right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland. One can be a Zionist and criticize Netanyahu, Ben-Gvir, Smotrich and Israeli government policies. Many Zionists, including Israelis, do so every day.

Let us be clear on what it means to be anti-Zionist. Anti-Zionism denies Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. It opposes the two-state solution that includes Israel. It is an ideology that is anti-Semitic at its core. It is the ideology of Hamas and those shamefully celebrating October 7 in our streets. That is why the Canadian government's own framework for combatting anti-Semitism recognizes that anti-Zionism is a form of anti-Semitism. There should be no place in Canada, the U.K. or any other country for a position that denies Israel's right to exist. We must all speak out against it.

* * *

DIESEL PRICES

Grant Jackson (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, as families prepare for Thanksgiving, farmers tell me that rising diesel prices are adding yet another cost they cannot afford. Brian, a farmer from Holland, told my office the price of diesel is becoming unsustainable. Many others agree.

After years of skyrocketing fertilizer and equipment costs, higher fuel prices may be the final straw for many farm families. These costs are not isolated to farmers. Every family putting food on the table this Thanksgiving pays these costs in higher food prices. Farmers cannot control the weather or the price at the pump, but the government controls how much it taxes the production of these essentials.

Conservatives put forward an emergency fuel relief plan to lower diesel costs and expand Canadian production, but the Liberals voted it down. West Manitoba farmers are working through difficult circumstances this fall to get the job done and deliver affordable food to tables. Why are the Liberals not prepared to do the same?

• (1110)

[Translation]

COMMUNITY HUB IN REPENTIGNY

Patrick Bonin (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, today I want to pay tribute to Centre à Nous, which expanded to a third building in 2023. Centre à Nous is much more than just a non-profit organization or a collection of buildings. It is a true hub of solidarity in the heart of Repentigny and a deeply inspiring model that reflects the strength of solidarity among Quebecers.

What makes the centre's model so exceptional is that Centre à Nous owns its facilities and is the largest centre of its kind in Canada. It offers organizations space at reduced rates, allowing them to devote more resources to what really matters: their mission and the people they serve.

Currently, 30 or so community organizations have set up shop there. In addition, there are support groups and recreational groups, an early childhood centre, and even services provided by the Lanaudière CISSS. Rather than working in isolation, the occupants share spaces, resources, and even a living environment. It is a place that builds connections, fosters mutual support and enables each organization to go even further in fulfilling its mission.

I would like to pay tribute to the vision and determination of the late Mario Morais, who believed deeply in this great project and helped bring it to fruition. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Sydney—Glacé Bay.

* * *

[English]

RETIREMENT CONGRATULATIONS

Mike Kelloway (Sydney—Glacé Bay, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I rise to recognize Bruce Clark of Glacé Bay, who has retired from the Nova Scotia Community College after 38 years of dedicated service, where he made a difference contributing to students, colleagues and our community. Bruce has spent decades serving the people of Cape Breton, including as mayor of Glacé Bay from 1981 to 1988.

Bruce is a true leader in our community, and I am grateful to call him a mentor and a friend.

On behalf of the residents of Sydney—Glacé Bay, I want to thank Bruce, his wife Jane and the Clark family for their many years of service and congratulate him on his retirement. I congratulate Bruce and send best wishes for his next chapter.

* * *

FARMERS

Lianne Rood (Middlesex—London, CPC): Madam Speaker, Thanksgiving is a time to slow down and give thanks for the blessings that sustain us and for the people whose work makes those blessings real. When we gather around our table and take in the spread before us, we can thank a farmer. The food we share comes from the steady hands and careful stewardship of farming families

Statements by Members

like those of Middlesex—London. Our communities are blessed with fertile land and have long taken pride in feeding Canada and the world. As a third-generation farmer, I know the quiet honour of this calling. It is early mornings and long seasons, skills passed from grandparents to parents to children, and a commitment to stewardship that does not waver.

Farmers are innovators, teachers, fixers and leaders. They carry forward a tradition that keeps our communities strong and our country fed. From my family, I wish all members a happy Thanksgiving. May our tables be full, our company warm and our gratitude deep. To all the farm families out there, I thank them for keeping Canada going. Their work is a gift to this nation, and their perseverance is a source of hope for us all.

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ST. LUKE'S FAMILY FUN FEST AND OTTAWA CENTRE CUP

Yasir Naqvi (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it gives me great joy to celebrate the St. Luke's Family Fun Fest and Ottawa Centre Cup. It is one of the largest community events in my riding during the summer. It is about basketball and bringing community together, but we do not just stop at basketball. Of course, we have a barbecue and ice cream and activities for the kids. It has been such an amazing gathering year after year in my community.

This year was special because we got to partner with the St. Luke's basketball community. They really have taken charge of this incredible community event. I want to give special thanks to Mahamat Hagggar, Aman Ehdego, Achuil Lual and the entire team for partnering with my community office and putting this incredible event together.

I am really looking forward to celebrating our community in Centretown once again next year with St. Luke's Family Fun Fest and Ottawa Centre Cup. Do not miss it.

* * *

FOOD AFFORDABILITY

Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, Thanksgiving used to be simple. We filled the table, squeezed in another chair and gave thanks that everyone was together. Families are now doing the math before they sit down. Can we afford the turkey? Do we need to skip something else? Do we invite fewer people, perhaps not the embarrassing uncle?

Oral Questions

Feeding everybody simply costs too much. This Thanksgiving, a turkey dinner will cost 10% more than last year. Since 2020, grocery prices have climbed by 33%. Families did not start eating one-third more. They are paying far more to put the same amount of food on the table.

Those costs begin long before the grocery store. When fuel prices rise, farmers pay more to grow food, truckers pay more to move it, and families pay the difference at the checkout.

There used to be a basic promise in this country, that if we work hard, we can put food on the table, fill the chairs around it and not worry about the cost. That should not be too much to ask here in Canada. Families are already cutting back. The only thing they should be cutting this Thanksgiving is a turkey.

* * *

● (1115)

TERRY FOX RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester, Lib.): Madam Speaker, 46 years after the Marathon of Hope, Terry Fox continues to inspire Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

On September 24, alongside the Minister of Health, Darrell Fox, health professionals and researchers, our government announced an investment of \$80 million over four years for the Terry Fox Research Institute.

[Translation]

This investment will help expand precision oncology and support more personalized treatments for patients across Canada.

[English]

The funding will also strengthen the Marathon of Hope Cancer Centres Network, bringing together more than 54 institutions, over 1,300 collaborators and the data of 15,000 patients to advance cancer research. This is another step on the journey Terry Fox began 46 years ago, helping researchers turn hope into action and discover better outcomes for Canadians. Let us finish it.

* * *

FOOD AFFORDABILITY

Jamil Jivani (Bowmanville—Oshawa North, CPC): Madam Speaker, this Thanksgiving, many moms and dads will go into debt, putting groceries on credit cards because they do not have enough cash in the bank. Liberals in Ottawa will say there is nothing they can do about it, but the reality is that Liberals could take action now if they cared enough to confront big business.

The Competition Bureau of Canada has spent years advocating for more competition in the grocery industry to lower food prices. The policy ideas are out there, ideas to stop property controls from blocking market entry, ideas to empower independent and online retailers, ideas to enforce clear unit pricing rules, but Liberals will not adopt those policies. Liberals will not confront big business. Instead, Liberals will use big government to enrich big business while hard-working Canadians struggle to afford food.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Madam Speaker, last Saturday, I was proud to join survivors, families and advocates at the Walk to End Intimate Partner Violence, in Durham region. Sadly, statistics show that more than four in 10 women in Canada will experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime. Behind those numbers are our friends, neighbours, co-workers and loved ones.

Today, I want to recognize the organizations working every day in my region to support survivors and prevent violence. Victim Services of Durham Region, Herizon House and Safety Network Durham are just a few organizations of many trying to stop intimate partner violence in Durham region.

As a father of three daughters, I believe that ending violence starts at home with the values we pass on to our children. Respect must always come first, and we must teach boys and men that they have a responsibility to be allies and develop healthy relationships. We must challenge harmful behaviour and help end the cycle of abuse.

Let us continue working together to build communities where safety, dignity and respect are the norm and where violence has no place.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the government must answer for today's devastating job numbers. Canada now has the lowest labour force participation in 29 years. A smaller percentage of Canadians are working today than at any point in the last 29 years. On the eve of Thanksgiving, we see that Canadians are not just losing jobs; many are losing hope.

Canadians will judge the government by the results, so will the government finally reverse course on policies that are making Canadians poorer and depriving them of opportunity?

Oral Questions

Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and to the Secretary of State (Canada Revenue Agency and Financial Institutions), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I should not need to remind any member of the House that we are in a trade war, and a trade war causes economic volatility. The job numbers last month reflect that volatility; that is clear, and we empathize with Canadians who might be struggling to keep their jobs.

What we are doing is controlling what we can. We have cut taxes on income, housing, fuel and new business investment. We have saved \$60 billion in government operations, have signed 20 new trade and security agreements and have seen the second-highest growth in the G7 and the highest foreign direct investment. This is how we respond in the face of a trade war.

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, that answer is both callous and fact-free. This is not just a month-over-month escalation. We were shedding jobs as a result of Liberal policies long before this trade war, and job losses are concentrated in sectors that are not trade-exposed. There were 68,000 jobs lost in the last month and 110,000 in the last two months. Unemployment is up to 6.5%, and youth unemployment is up to 13%, with 50,000 jobs lost in Quebec alone.

We did not get to a 29-year low in labour force participation overnight. It is not just month over month. It was not always like this in Canada. It will not always be like this in Canada, but we need an implementation of the economic action plan that Conservatives have put forward.

When will the Liberals act to get Canadians—

• (1120)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and to the Secretary of State (Canada Revenue Agency and Financial Institutions), Lib.): Madam Speaker, while the Conservatives focus on QP skits and clips for their online social media feeds to scare Canadians, we are stepping up to support them every step of the way. We are investing in our economy and have made generational investments. We have cut taxes on income, housing, fuel and new business investment. In fact, the productivity mega deduction that the Prime Minister announced at the investment summit makes Canada the most tax-competitive advanced economy in the entire world. That is going to bring in new investment, help counteract the trade war and create jobs for Canadians.

Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is Thanksgiving, and this morning's latest job numbers are devastating. Almost 70,000 jobs were lost in September, bringing that to a staggering 110,000 jobs lost in just two months. Unemployment has skyrocketed to 6.5%, which is the second highest in the G7.

Recently I spoke with Jordan, a father in Richmond Hill who is worried about losing his job while struggling to keep up with the Liberal affordability crisis. While hard-working Canadians worry about their next paycheck, the out-of-touch Liberal government keeps delivering more talk but no results.

How many more Canadians have to lose their jobs before the Liberal Prime Minister puts down the \$500 buttercups and admits that he is failing to do his?

Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.): Madam Speaker, Canadians are looking for a serious government with a serious plan, and that is what we are delivering.

Global volatility, economic uncertainty and trade tensions are having a direct impact on Canadian families, workers and businesses, but we are focused on what we can control. We are focused on investing, driving growth, attracting investment and investing in people and skills and the retraining we need. Our per capita job creation has nearly doubled that of the United States since September 2024, and our private sector is holding strong, creating 24,000 new jobs in September and adding 163,000 jobs—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Richmond Hill South.

Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC): Madam Speaker, we Conservatives have a serious plan to save Canadian jobs and save Canadians' money.

Let us talk about Emily, who is a young graduate from Richmond Hill who did everything right. She studied hard and earned her degree, but is still left jobless after almost two years and is living in her parents' basement. Young Canadians like Emily are watching their opportunities disappear after 11 years of the Liberal government. She is not alone. Nearly 67,000 youth jobs vanished in just two months. Meanwhile, wages have grown at just 2.3%, below the latest inflation rate of 3%. Worse, 35% of young adults under 35 still live with their parents.

Is this how the Liberal Prime Minister wants to bring together families on Thanksgiving?

Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague opposite had the chance to vote in support of team Canada strong, which is making generational investments to hire up to 100,000 new Red Seal trade workers to support building and support the investments we are making right across the country.

Oral Questions

As part of team Canada strong, we are opening up paid apprenticeship placements in early 2027. We have introduced a new apprenticeship training grant, with a \$5,000 completion bonus and \$10,000 in wage incentives for employers to hire new apprentices. This is the kind of serious action that Canadians—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Beauce.

[Translation]

Jason Groleau (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, this week, the Prime Minister's parliamentary secretary told the House that everything is going well in Canada, that the cost of housing is dropping and that job creation is up across the country. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister recently asked us to give him a break because he just got here, even though he has been here for 18 months already. Today, we learned that 50,000 jobs were lost in Quebec alone in September.

Does anyone on the other side of the House have the courage to stand up, look Quebecers in the eye and tell them that losing 50,000 jobs in one month is good news?

Caroline Desrochers (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are working hard with the premiers of all of the provinces and territories, across party lines, to build a stronger economy.

Because of this co-operation, this summer, we were able to launch the Churchill Falls project, which will save Quebec taxpayers \$200 billion and create 23,000 jobs. Other examples include the Davie shipyard, which will create 5,000 jobs, and the Via Rail project that is being carried out by Alstom in La Pocatière, which will create 700 jobs.

We are investing in housing and infrastructure to create tens of thousands of jobs. We are there for working Canadians and Quebecers. That is why they elected us.

Jason Groleau (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, we are in a cost of living crisis. People are struggling to keep a roof over their heads. Gas is expensive. The cost of diesel has doubled in a year, and home prices have tripled in the last 10 or 11 years of Liberal governance. As if that were not bad enough, we are also learning that people are losing their jobs. In the past two months, August and September, 68,000 jobs were lost in Quebec alone. The Liberals are completely out of touch with the reality facing Canadians.

Will they stop sending money to other countries and start taking care of the people here at home?

• (1125)

Caroline Desrochers (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to set the record straight and get back to the facts.

Yes, the economic situation is difficult. Yes, we live in a volatile world. I would point out, however, that housing construction has increased, including in Montreal. Rents have dropped across Canada. We have signed agreements with Quebec to build 4,000 housing units. We recently launched the Canada rental protection fund to protect our affordable housing stock.

When it comes to affordability and to helping Quebecers and Canadians, the truth is that the Conservatives vote against every affordability measure we propose. It is hard to take what they are saying seriously.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Madam Speaker, the ultimate proof that Bill C-39 is a pro-oil bill is that the Conservatives voted for it yesterday alongside the Liberals. In Canada, the only time the Conservatives get along with the Liberals is when there is an opportunity to undermine the environment for the benefit of oil companies. When the Liberals propose getting rid of impact assessments for pipelines, suspending the enforcement of environmental laws and sacrificing endangered species, the Conservatives vote red. Frankly, that should worry a lot of Liberals.

Who in this government ran for office intending to join forces with the Conservatives against the environment?

Hon. Julie Dabrusin (Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I was in Sherbrooke to celebrate a great program that will help Quebecers and Canadians access heat pumps. This is important because it will help us improve energy efficiency across the country.

To do that, we need to build a stronger electrical grid. That is what we are doing with the bill before the House today. We are continuing our efforts to beef up the electrical grid, and we are working together with Hydro-Québec to ensure we can reach net zero.

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Liberals and the Conservatives are joining forces to bulldoze over us with Bill C-39, for the benefit of the oil companies.

Fortunately, opponents are starting to mobilize. The Liberal member for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country has spoken out against his party's bill. He is afraid that ministers will be able to unilaterally suspend environmental legislation. He understands that limiting consultations to one year amounts to setting a time limit on the involvement of indigenous peoples and civil society.

Who else on the government side has the courage to say that Bill C-39 is a pro-oil bill?

Hon. Julie Dabrusin (Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to be very clear: There will be no lowering of environmental standards or indigenous consultation requirements.

What are we doing? We are focusing on efficiency. That way, we can pursue critically important clean energy projects, like the one in Churchill Falls, which can generate enough energy to power every home in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. There will be enough energy to power all those cities combined.

However, there is more. We are going to work with Hydro-Québec and with Quebecers and Canadians across the country to make sure that we have clean energy.

Patrick Bonin (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, the Liberal-Conservative alliance in support of Bill C-39 is putting us on a fast track to dirty oil. If they are prepared to move quickly, then we must be prepared to act just as quickly.

On Tuesday, the Liberal MP for West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country condemned Bill C-39. Yesterday, the Cold Lake First Nations asked the courts to overturn the decision to fast-track the Pacific Link pipeline. We need to follow these examples. The Bloc Québécois calls on all those who still care about the environment to unite against Bill C-39.

Is there anyone on the other side who still cares?

Hon. Nathalie Provost (Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question, which is a very important one. We do care about the environment. We are committed to tackling climate change. These are important issues, but to achieve our goals, the whole of Canada must work together.

That is what Bill C-39 is designed to do. Yes, there are ways to improve it, and we will do so, but Bill C-39 does not lower environmental standards. It amends the process. Once everyone understands the whole process, which involves the provinces and Canada, we will succeed. We will tackle climate change, we will have clean energy and we will build Canada well.

* * *

[English]

EMPLOYMENT

Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Sturgeon River, CPC): Madam Speaker, as we head into Thanksgiving, the latest StatsCan jobs report is in, and the numbers are devastating: nearly 70,000 jobs lost in September. That is on top of the 42,000 jobs lost in August. Unemployment is up, and Canada has the second-highest unemployment rate in the G7.

In the face of these dismal jobs numbers, does the Prime Minister take any responsibility?

• (1130)

Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and to the Secretary of State (Canada Revenue Agency and Financial Institutions), Lib.): Madam Speaker, this Thanksgiving, Canadians should know that we are stepping up to support them with the cost of living. We have cut taxes on income, housing, fuel and new business investment, while we have moved forward with affordability measures like the Canada groceries and essentials benefit, which will put \$1,890 over the course of the next year in families' pockets. We also moved forward with the home retrofit program, which was announced just yesterday, and the national school food program.

Do members know what the missing ingredient is at this Thanksgiving dinner? It is the Conservative Party being willing to stand up for Canadians. We have not seen that for some time in this House. It would—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for St. Albert—Sturgeon River.

Oral Questions

Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Sturgeon River, CPC): Madam Speaker, 110,000 Canadians have been out of work in just the past 60 days. We have the second-highest unemployment rate in the G7, with the worst labour participation rate in 30 years. Meanwhile, real wages continue to decline. That is the Prime Minister's record.

The Prime Minister promised the strongest economy in the G7, so will he acknowledge that once again his rhetoric does not match reality?

Hon. Evan Solomon (Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we all know that we are in a very challenging trade war. That is why the thing to do is build major projects and create jobs. That is exactly what we are doing. At Darlington, we are building North America's first grid-scale small modular reactors, with 18,000 construction jobs and 3,700 energy jobs. In Pickering, we are rebuilding the nuclear plant, with 30,000-plus jobs. East of Saskatoon, crews are building a potash mine, with 5,500 construction jobs.

We are building the jobs. If only the Conservatives would come on board and join us.

* * *

[Translation]

FINANCE

Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC): Madam Speaker, there is the nuclear deal with Westinghouse, the hydro-electric deal with Evolugen, pension funds with the Maple Fund, real estate deals for data centres, the European Space Agency campus, and now there is Enercare and its heat pumps. Yes, Canada is now in the heat pump business. Come on.

People are struggling to put food on the table, but there is no need to worry, because the Liberal government is going to help pay for their heat pump. What do all of these deals have in common? It is Brookfield. The Prime Minister is not even trying to hide his conflicts of interest anymore.

Can the Liberals explain why every government announcement can be linked, directly or indirectly, to Brookfield?

Hon. Julie Dabrusin (Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I was in Sherbrooke to make the announcement, and I have to wonder why the Conservatives are so opposed to helping Canadians and Quebecers install heat pumps, which would make heating their homes more affordable.

On average, Canadians will see a reduction of \$1,400 per year in the cost of heating their homes. This will have a particularly significant impact in Quebec.

Oral Questions

Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC): Madam Speaker, who administers the Prime Minister's conflict of interest screen? It is his chief of staff and the Clerk of the Privy Council, both of whom report directly to the Prime Minister. Meanwhile, Brookfield is active in the nuclear, energy, real estate, and infrastructure sectors.

Yesterday, the Liberals announced yet another debt-financed program. It involves investing \$2 billion in heat pumps. Once again, Brookfield is involved in this sector. They are telling us to trust them. At the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics, members called for a more transparent mechanism.

Will the government establish an effective ethics system administered by non-partisan individuals?

Hon. Nathalie Provost (Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is unbelievable. We spend days and days talking about affordability. We hear about the challenges facing citizens as we go through a major economic crisis, and yet people nitpick us when all we are doing is working for Canadians. We are working to promote affordability through the heat pump program. That is more than \$1,400 per household. One million households across Canada will be eligible for the program, not to mention the Canada groceries and essentials benefit, child care, the Canada child benefit, and so on.

There are tons of programs—

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Barrie South—Innisfil.

John Brassard (Barrie South—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday, the Prime Minister pulled the curtain back on how he is using the power of his office, aligning public policy to line his pockets.

When the Prime Minister announced that two billion tax dollars would be used to subsidize heat pumps, he stood at a microphone knowing he owned shares in Trane heat pumps, Schneider Electric and Brookfield, which owns Enercare, a seller and installer of heat pumps. The conflict of interest is so obvious, but, worse, it is a breach of trust.

The Prime Minister is funnelling billions of dollars to heat pump subsidies while he and Brookfield-connected companies are positioned to benefit. Are Canadians supposed to believe that this is just a coincidence?

• (1135)

Hon. Julie Dabrusin (Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature, Lib.): Madam Speaker, leave it to Conservatives, as we head into the heating season and Canadians are thinking about affordable energy to heat their homes, to talk about knocking out a program that on average will save Canadians \$1,400 a year. That is a lot of money in the pockets of Canadians in all of their communities and all of our communities.

This is important for making sure that we are supporting families who need it the most.

John Brassard (Barrie South—Innisfil, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians are concerned about corruption and cronyism. This is

about breaching public trust by using the power and levers of the Prime Minister's Office to announce public policies funnelling billions of tax dollars that will personally benefit the Prime Minister's assets, blind or not, and he knows it. At a minimum, this is cronyism, but some could argue that this crosses the line of not just a conflict of interest but self-dealing happening within the Prime Minister's Office.

Will someone on the other side have the guts to call the Prime Minister out on this conflict like so many Canadians have over the past 24 hours?

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, shame on the Conservatives. They are all about character assassination.

Let me tell the House what the government and this Prime Minister have accomplished over the last 18 months. That is how we deliver for Canadians. We deliver by major projects. We deliver by tax breaks. We deliver by dealing with issues like affordability and the environment and by building a stronger and healthier economy.

They should stop the character assassinations and get onside with team Canada.

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Madam Speaker, the only thing higher than the member's voice is the Prime Minister's stock portfolio this week.

The Prime Minister is delivering for Liberal insiders, not ordinary Canadians. His \$2-billion heat pump announcement yesterday stands to benefit companies like Trane and Enercare. The Prime Minister's ethics filing shows that he owns shares in Trane, and guess who owns Enercare. It is Brookfield.

We know that the Prime Minister's ethics disclosure shows he has millions of dollars of shares in Brookfield. What is he pumping, heat into Canadian homes or cash into Brookfield?

Hon. Julie Dabrusin (Minister of the Environment, Climate Change and Nature, Lib.): Madam Speaker, since we are not going to be able to count on Conservatives to tell their constituents how the program works, let me explain it. What we have done is created a program that will give all homeowners access to \$2,000 to \$10,000 to buy a heat pump so they can lower their bills. On average, that is going to deliver \$1,400 a year in savings. They will be able to apply online and get a response within 24 hours. That means if their heating conks out, they will be able to get funding to support a new heat pump quickly.

[Translation]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, with all due respect, Louise Arbour, the Governor General, has no business interfering in Quebec's political debate over the monarchy. Her role does not extend to offering legal opinions, much less meddling in Quebec politics. Furthermore, she is in a clear conflict of interest, considering that she represents the monarchy in Canada. Despite her internationally recognized skills, she agreed to serve as a symbolic ribbon cutter. In the end, it was her decision and she has to take responsibility for it.

Will the government remind her that it is her duty to be circumspect and that she should mind her own business?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): I would remind the hon. member that we do not speak of the Governor General in such terms.

David Myles (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages and to the Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.): Madam Speaker, Quebecers' priorities are focused on building a stronger economy, making life more affordable, protecting workers from American tariffs and preserving the French language. That is what our government is focused on, today and always.

Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Madam Speaker, there is unanimity in Quebec. All members of the Quebec National Assembly voted to abolish the oath to the British Crown. In Quebec, the general public and politicians alike agree that a foreign country's monarchy, an undemocratic symbol, must be removed from our institutions.

The only thing Quebecers will miss less than the monarchy in the Red Hall is the Governor General's opinion on the matter. Will the government remind Ms. Arbour that, when she accepted her position, she also agreed to give up politics?

David Myles (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages and to the Secretary of State (Nature), Lib.): Madam Speaker, as I explained, Quebecers' priority is to build a stronger economy. That message was loud and clear with the election of our colleague, the member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. We will continue to support the French language in Quebec and to invest in culture. We have made huge investments over the past few months. We will continue to support Quebec.

* * *

• (1140)

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, Thanksgiving should be a time for families to gather around a full dinner table, not worry about whether they can afford to put food on it, yet Thanksgiving dinner is projected to cost an extra 10% again this year. At Simcoe Hall Settlement House in Oshawa, food donations are just one-third of normal levels.

Oral Questions

After 11 years of the Liberals, will the government finally admit that Canada is officially in an affordability crisis, and explain why they voted against our Conservative plan, which would have lowered food costs while families in Oshawa struggle to put food on the table this Thanksgiving?

Ryan Turnbull (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and National Revenue and to the Secretary of State (Canada Revenue Agency and Financial Institutions), Lib.): Madam Speaker, what would lower food costs is if the member actually stood up and supported jobs in the Durham region. She and her party voted against the Canada Growth Fund, which invested \$2 billion in the new nuclear project at Darlington, creating 18,000 construction jobs and 3,700 jobs in operations once the SMRs are in operation. That is significant support. That is how we build an affordable lifestyle. It is giving workers and young people chances to earn a good living and have wages outpace inflation. That is exactly—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Oshawa.

Rhonda Kirkland (Oshawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would have a lot more respect for the member for Whitby if he was standing up for the auto workers in our community.

The Simcoe Hall Settlement House food bank in Oshawa is now capped at 70 households a day. Demand has not fallen; it is having to turn people away, but food being donated has.

Grocery costs are still rising while meals are getting smaller and smaller for families. After years of reckless Liberal deficits and tax-and-spend policies, families cannot afford a basic Thanksgiving dinner.

Will the Liberals please tell us by which Thanksgiving exactly we can expect to have grocery prices stop rising, or will the Liberals admit they have no plan?

Jennifer McKelvie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government cares deeply about affordability, whether it be prices at the grocery store or rent. Indeed, we have seen across Canada, 24 months in a row, that rents have been coming down. We are also making historic investments in housing, including in Oshawa, in the member's riding, where, with the help of the ACLP, we have invested \$188 million to build 502 homes on the former foundry lands. These are homes for Canadians. We are also getting them to build those homes, which is creating jobs, and many of them will be affordable.

Oral Questions

Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Madam Speaker, Thanksgiving is a time to be grateful. There is a lot to be thankful for, including the beautiful country we live in, but since the Liberals took office 11 years ago, costs have been on the rise, including for Thanksgiving dinner, which will be 10% more expensive this year.

Conservatives have shared our plan to cut fuel taxes and save Canadians money. Will the Liberals admit that after their 11 years in power, there is an affordability crisis in Canada?

Leslie Church (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretaries of State for Labour, for Seniors, and for Children and Youth, and to the Minister of Jobs and Families (Persons with Disabilities), Lib.): Madam Speaker, earlier this week, over 35,000 constituents of the member across the way received the groceries and essentials benefit. That is an important support that we put in place to try to address the increased cost of living that we know families are experiencing. I would ask the member to go back to his riding and support the national school food program, because that program in Alberta is helping to put food on the table for kids going to school in 63 public school jurisdictions and is supporting close to 60,000 kids. Those are important measures.

Jeff Kibble (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, CPC): Madam Speaker, in the face of over 68,000 jobs being lost last month, this Thanksgiving, families on Vancouver Island are doing the math at the checkout. Statistics Canada reports that grocery prices have risen 30% since August 2021. Neighbours are stepping up and donating, volunteering and picking up the phone to check in on one another. Canadians should not have to carry this alone. The Liberal government talks up its relief plans, which never reach most Canadians at the till.

When will the Prime Minister close the gap so that all Vancouver Island families can afford a Thanksgiving?

Hon. Jill McKnight (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we know that British Columbians are facing affordability challenges right now, and we are working with Canadians to support them. That is why we made things, such as the national school food program, permanent. That is why we have the groceries and essentials benefit, which was paid into bank accounts on Monday. That is why we have the Canada child benefit.

My colleague across the way is from Vancouver Island, where we know that over 70,000 families have received that benefit. It is important. These are the steps we are taking to support Canadians.

* * *

● (1145)

TAXATION

David Bexte (Bow River, CPC): Madam Speaker, after 11 years of the Liberal government, arbitrary and out-of-control taxation is only making matters worse. This Thanksgiving, Canadian families are paying more just to put food on the table. Dalhousie University estimates that a Thanksgiving turkey dinner will cost 10% more this year. Meanwhile, Canadian farmers, including farmers in Bow River, are facing the most expensive harvest in history.

Conservatives have a plan to save Canadians money, but the Liberals are all talk and no results. Would the Liberal government finally admit that, after 11 years, Canada is officially in an affordability crisis?

Corey Hogan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as this is my last chance before Alberta votes on October 19, I wanted to start by saying that, if we say we are going to “stand on guard for thee”, we can stand in line to vote and make sure we vote when the referendum comes.

On the question the member asked, I want to identify that, in Alberta, we created 83,000 jobs in the last year. Rents are down, and housing prices are down. Affordability is a concern. There is more to do, and we will do it with that member's support.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Chris Malette (Bay of Quinte, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government was elected on a promise to invest in ourselves and strengthen our communities, and we are doing just that, but these investments go beyond dollars and cents. Each of these investments make a real difference in people's lives.

In my own region, the government has announced the transformational investment of \$66 million in the community of Tyendinaga, with the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte, to expand access to safe, reliable drinking water. This is reconciliation in action.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Jennifer McKelvie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague so very much for his tireless advocacy for eastern Ontario as part of our caucus.

Through the build communities strong fund, our government is investing billions of dollars from coast to coast to coast to improve the lives of Canadians. Our announcement of more than \$66 million to extend the water main in Tyendinaga means water security, support for housing and progress on our work to ensure everyone in this country has access to safe drinking water. This is the work our constituents across the country expect from our government, and we will keep delivering for the Great Lakes and every part of Canada.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, nearly 10,000 veterans disability benefit applications are overdue and have passed the government's own service delivery standard. Yesterday, I asked the veterans minister about the 20% cut to the staff who review those applications. It was in her own departmental plan. She said that it is not cutting but sunseting the positions.

She can call it what she likes. Veterans just want their disability benefit applications reviewed, and they want access to the benefits they earned through their service to our country, so on what date will the backlog of 10,000 applications be reduced to zero?

Hon. Jill McKnight (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I start by acknowledging the service that our colleague across the way has provided on behalf of Canada, and I thank him for that.

Since 2021, VAC has reduced the average processing time for first applications by 57%. We know there is more to do. That is why our budget in 2025 invested \$184.9 million over four years and \$40 million ongoing in benefit delivery stabilization and modernization. Along with a review of forms and processes, we are working to ensure veterans connect with team members so that we can get them the supports they are eligible for.

Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands—Rideau Lakes, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the response, but what veterans are looking for is an answer. They are looking for a date by which they will have a review and an answer on accessing the benefits they have earned. They have done their job. They have served Canada with unlimited liability. It is time for the government to step up, end the backlog of 10,000 applications and deliver for veterans.

The question is very simple: By what date will the minister and her department deliver zero above that service delivery standard?

Hon. Jill McKnight (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we know that for a veteran who is waiting for their benefits, any timeline can feel challenging, and we are here to support them. That is why we have reduced the average processing time by 57% since 2021. At the same time, we have also seen an increase of 90% in the number of applications for disability benefits over the past decade. We are making the investments to stabilize and modernize service delivery. The work is under way, and I will have more to share.

* * *

● (1150)

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Ellis Ross (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister says he wants to fast-track the Pacific link pipeline while promising first nations that they will decide if the project goes ahead. Our representative at the B.C. First Nations Leadership Council said the Prime Minister assured them that we will get consent.

Oral Questions

Will the Prime Minister approve the pipeline, even if just one of the 129-plus first nations along the pipeline route does not provide consent?

Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indigenous rights are not an obstacle to building Canada strong. They are part of the foundation on which we will build it.

As part of our duty to consult, we heard directly from more than 130 indigenous communities across Alberta and B.C. Where appropriate, accommodations will be made. Further consultations will inform conditions for Pacific link guided by UNDRIP and anchored in the principle of free, prior and informed consent. We will always respect the rights of indigenous people.

Ellis Ross (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, CPC): Madam Speaker, this is exactly what the Prime Minister claimed, that he provided full, meaningful consultation with indigenous peoples, and he has made different promises to different First Nations. Is he seeking consensus or following UNDRIP commitments while fast-tracking the Pacific link major project designation with only two months of consultation?

Will the Prime Minister only approve the pipeline if all the 129-plus nations provide consent?

Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we will continue to work with indigenous communities across Canada, and as part of the work moving forward to ensure that we get these projects over time, the key criteria in this is to ensure that we advance indigenous interests with meaningful participation, meaningful equity and meaningful partnership. We are going to continue to build with first nations communities, and we are going to continue to ensure that we are all moving forward together.

Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, let us see if we can make it three for three with the same answer.

Last week, the Prime Minister smiled for another photo op with chiefs to announce a new pipeline. Conservatives know we need to unlock our resources and get this pipeline built, but announcements are not results, photo ops are not consultation and Liberals' claiming relationships with chiefs and councils does not make it real. Chief Trevor Mercredi said that using first nation leaders in press conferences does not mean a vote of confidence.

Oral Questions

Why is the Prime Minister putting crucial major projects in jeopardy by using first nation chiefs as photo ops?

Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, let me reiterate what we are saying on this side of the board. Indigenous rights are not an obstacle for building Canada strong; they are part of the foundation on which we will build it. We will continue to work with first nations communities. We will continue to work with indigenous people. On this side of the House, we respect constitutional rights and we respect consultation. We will continue to do so.

Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, here is another opportunity for something new. Treaty chiefs are not the only ones calling out the Liberal government. The AFN national chief that said that those at the Major Projects Office “don't know what they are doing when it comes to First Nations” and that it is a pattern for this government and its MPO CEOs to act like they are too good to meet with chiefs. The truth is that treaty rights do not disappear when they become inconvenient for Liberals.

Chiefs are tired of the announcements and photo ops, so why did the Prime Minister create a Major Projects Office just to disrespect chiefs and cover his failures on building major projects in this country?

Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on this side of the House we believe in economic reconciliation. That means, when we are advancing projects that are important to this country, that we ensure we are advancing indigenous interests, which means, and I will say it again for the other side so they hear it loud and clear, we are making sure it is meaningful partnership, meaningful equity and meaningful participation in all projects moving forward. Indigenous communities will build together with the government.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Jason Groleau (Beauce, CPC): Madam Speaker, the cost of living has skyrocketed over the past 11 years under this Liberal government. Whether it is the price of housing or homes, which has tripled, or the price of groceries, gas or diesel, which has doubled in recent years, everything is more expensive under this inflationary and completely irresponsible government. Even a Thanksgiving meal is no longer affordable for Canadian families.

My question is simple. Does the government acknowledge that, after 11 years of the Liberals, Canada is officially in a cost of living crisis?

• (1155)

Caroline Desrochers (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Housing and Infrastructure, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we recognize that we are going through a period of economic volatility and uncertainty. However, our government is choosing to invest in our economy, in our families and in our workers. Since this summer, we have announced hundreds of projects and investments, including some in my colleague's riding. These projects will create jobs. We have signed agreements with Quebec for the Davie ship-

yard, the Contrecoeur terminal and Churchill Falls. We are there for Canadians and Quebecers.

Joël Godin (Saint-Augustin—Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Madam Speaker, simply put, the hundreds of announcements that were made this summer are not working. We saw the unemployment rate this morning.

The Liberal government has been in office for 11 years and it has to accept responsibility for the current situation. Will the government acknowledge that Canada is in a difficult economic situation and that Canadians are experiencing an affordability crisis? Families will be feeling the effects of that crisis even more acutely this Thanksgiving weekend. If we want to find solutions, we need to admit that there is a problem.

Will the government acknowledge the situation and admit that we are in the midst of a crisis?

Daniel Gobeil (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Liberal Party recognizes that affordability is a challenge. We have implemented a lot of measures over the past year. We lowered taxes for 22 million Canadians, provided help with groceries and essential services and paused the tax on fuel. We also implemented the Canadian dental care plan for families, seniors and children. All these measures are helping Canadians with affordability. We are not going to stop there. We will continue to help Quebecers and Canadians.

[English]

Pat Kelly (Calgary Crowfoot, CPC): Madam Speaker, Canadians have much to be thankful for in our beloved country, but many Canadians are struggling with the high cost of food. Dalhousie University reports that turkey is up 10% from last Thanksgiving, which of course was up from the year before, because 11 years of Liberal taxes, spending, deficits and declining economic productivity have created a homegrown Canadian affordability crisis.

Will the Liberals admit that their response to this crisis is all talk and has produced no results?

Hon. Kody Blois (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we certainly recognize that there are affordability challenges across the country, but I would reject the premise and the way in which the member opposite has framed it, which is that this is a homegrown challenge. There are challenges across the G7. We are dealing with circumstances with a blockade at the Strait of Hormuz and its impacts on energy.

The government has been focused on what we can control in this country. That is why we have lowered taxes. That is why we have implemented the groceries and essentials rebate, which is supporting up to \$1,800 for a family of four in the country. We are building the Canadian economy strong. That is our focus right now.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Jake Sawatzky (New Westminster—Burnaby—Maillardville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, young Canadians are facing a world that is being changed by AI. Young people want to know that they will be ready with the skills and experience to compete.

Can the Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation tell the House what the government is doing to prepare young Canadians for that future?

Hon. Evan Solomon (Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his remarkable advocacy for young people.

In our new AI national strategy, which is based on trust, opportunity and sovereign control, we are investing in jobs and opportunities for young people. That is why we just launched our new free bilingual AI national literacy course for a million students and 50,000 teachers. I would encourage everyone to take it.

We have also just launched our new jobs program for 90,000 job placements for young people. The first 10,000 just launched. That is how we build this country strong for young Canadians.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Harb Gill (Windsor West, CPC): Madam Speaker, Thanksgiving is supposed to be about sitting down with one's family and being thankful for what one has. However, for far too many Canadians, that dinner table has become a place where they sit down and worry about how they are going to make ends meet. Under the Liberal government, groceries cost more, housing costs more and the bills keep piling up. Canadians do not need more talking points. They need results.

Can the government finally admit that, after 11 years of Liberal rule, Canadians are facing an unprecedented affordability crisis?

Hon. Evan Solomon (Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Lib.): Madam Speaker, if the Conservatives really cared about affordability, they would actually vote for affordability measures. We just took the excise tax off gas. The PBO says that is going to save the average family \$276 a year. We just launched a heat pump program that will save an average family \$1,400 a year.

Will the Conservatives support that? No. Do they support child care? No. Do they support the national food program? No. Do they support the measures that we are taking to build affordable homes? The answer is no. In the member's riding, we are supporting businesses and affordability. He should get on board.

* * *

● (1200)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, last year, a group of community activists told a Manitoba court that licensed hunters could pass its checkpoint, yet this fall, hunters are

Oral Questions

once again being turned away. The province has issued a cease and desist letter, while the RCMP says it is still waiting for direction. A public highway is not a private driveway. Hunters have legal authority to hunt during hunting season and legally issued hunting licences cannot be overruled at a roadside checkpoint.

Will the Minister of Public Safety stand up for law-abiding hunters or will the Liberal government stand by while an illegal roadside checkpoint decides who can and cannot use a public highway or hunt on Crown land?

Jacques Ramsay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to remind the House that it is the RCMP that has operational jurisdiction for this matter and it is contracted by the Province of Manitoba. I have every confidence that it will be able to fulfill its duties in the correct way. It is up to the RCMP to decide what action should be taken.

Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, since October 1, I have multiple constituents receiving notice from the Liberal government's gun-grab program that they must ship their firearms to the government via Purolator, FedEx or UPS by October 17 in order to receive compensation. All three couriers have refused as they restrict shipping of firearms without prior approval.

Did the public safety minister even consider this requirement or is this just a way for the Liberals to keep costs down on this multi-billion-dollar boondoggle? When will the government end its attacks on law-abiding, vetted and licensed firearms owners?

Jacques Ramsay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the reports we have from most gun owners is that the procedure is going well. If the member has heard about any specific cases where it is not working, I would invite him to connect with me or with our ministry, and we will make sure it works. We will make every effort to make sure this program works. This is our promise.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Giovanna Mingarelli (Prescott—Russell—Cumberland, Lib.): Madam Speaker, our government is delivering the most comprehensive trade diversification strategy in a generation. We are opening doors around the world so that businesses and innovators in my riding and across Canada have every opportunity to grow and thrive.

Oral Questions

Can the Minister of International Trade share with Canadians how our trade diversification strategy is standing with Canadian businesses to help them reach new customers, find new markets and create jobs here at home?

Hon. Maninder Sidhu (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague and friend from Prescott—Russell—Cumberland for her tireless efforts to support the workers and local businesses in her community.

In fact, I met with a local business at the Poland defence show, Tulmar Safety Systems. I would like to congratulate it as it recently secured a multi-year supply grant with the U.K. armed forces to supply them with 12,000 Canadian-made tactical life preservers, supporting good-paying local Canadian jobs.

Plan A is working. We are building strength at home while we diversify abroad.

* * *

[Translation]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC): Madam Speaker, yesterday, at the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, we learned that Alto, a project commissioned by the Liberal government, has been signing non-disclosure agreements with property appraisers, surveyors, well-known law firms, local authorities and even the former Quebec government, with the objective of accelerating the expropriation of agricultural land along the route.

In the interests of full transparency, the secret agreement with the former Quebec government contains a 30-day termination clause. Does this period begin from the date of signature or from the date the notice of termination is served?

Carlos Leitão (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question, because the Alto high-speed rail project is a very important issue.

I would like to know whether our Conservative friends agree. I do not believe they do. I think our Conservative friends are against the Alto project. After having supported it for many years, they have now suddenly decided that it is no longer worthwhile.

For our part, we see it as a project for the future. It will help build a much stronger country by connecting Ontario and Quebec, creating thousands of jobs and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. That is why we support the Alto project.

* * *

● (1205)

[English]

STEEL AND ALUMINUM INDUSTRY

Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Madam Speaker, 500 Canadian steelworkers at Stelco are being thrown out of work by a U.S. corporation and its Trump-supporting CEO. Cleveland-Cliffs violated the commitments it made as a condition of this foreign takeover. This is a MAGA-driven attempt to deindustrialize Canada by stripping away our manufacturing capacity and jobs.

Steel is a strategic industry. It underpins our economy, our sovereignty and our national security. The future of Canadian steel must be decided in Canada.

Will the Liberal government stand up for Canadian workers and secure this vital—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Karim Bardeesy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we have been very clear that this is a betrayal of the workers and a betrayal of the commitments that were made when that company was acquired. We have been very clear. The Minister of Industry has written a letter insisting that within five business days, the company come back with a plan to make sure all unionized workers, as promised, have jobs in Canada. That deadline is coming up early next week. We look forward to hearing back from the company.

* * *

TRANSPORTATION

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, British Columbians rallied last month demanding fair federal ferry funding. First nations, local governments, the B.C. Chamber of Commerce, unions and residents delivered the same message. Otawa covers 43% of East Coast Ferries' operating costs and invests hundreds of millions of dollars in infrastructure, which we support, but B.C. gets just 3% and loans that ferry users must repay.

With fares facing 30% increases, will the government finally modernize B.C.'s 50-year-old agreement and fairly fund B.C.'s marine highway?

Mike Kelloway (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the marine sector on the west coast is important to this Canadian government. We want a productive, efficient and effective marine sector. When it comes to ferries in British Columbia, it is a Crown corporation, BC Ferries, that is regulated by the province. We do provide substantial monies toward operating, but we will be on the side of BC Ferries where it makes sense because it is important to British Columbians and, for that matter, its important to Canadians.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

PETITIONS

CANADIAN POST CORPORATION

Alex Ruff (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am presenting a petition today on behalf of my constituents who have pointed out that Canada Post and the governing Liberals are taking an axe to long-treasured postal services, eliminating good jobs, eliminating door-to-door delivery and lowering mail delivery standards. As well, they are pointing out that these cuts have not been released publicly and that these cuts are disproportionately going to impact seniors, disabled Canadians, in particular rural Canadians, and remote and indigenous populations.

They are calling upon the Government of Canada to stop these postal service cuts and to immediately launch a full, transparent, mandated review of Canada Post that allows all stakeholders to provide meaningful input.

EXPORT OF HORSES

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, if I may, permit me to wish everyone a very happy Thanksgiving as we are about to leave Ottawa for the moment.

These petitioners within my riding and across Canada are extremely concerned, and I am very honoured to get this petition in before we have our Thanksgiving constituency week.

This is the issue that really troubles so many Canadians, and I give thanks to Jann Arden for making sure people do not forget. We ship live horses out of this country to other countries for slaughter, often for consumption as sushi. It just makes Canadians so desperately upset about the idea of the inhumane treatment of these horses, shipping them on airplanes. The petitioners ask that the Government of Canada please ban the export of horses for slaughter by amending the Health of Animals Regulations to prohibit this practice.

• (1210)

IMMIGRATION SECURITY SCREENING

Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise to present a petition that was signed by over 3,000 petitioners. The petitioners are concerned with the historically long time that security screening is taking for immigration files. They point out the harms to families, to their careers and to finances that extensively long security screening times are creating. They are calling on CSIS to publish measurable service standards, establish a documented escalation and review process, publish aggregate data and develop an immigration screening backlog reduction plan.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a petition from Vancouver Islanders. They highlight that indigenous and affordable housing providers, including M'akola Housing Society in British Columbia, are facing the expiration of long-standing federal operating agreements. The expiration of these agreements threatens the affordability of 528 indigenous homes across British Columbia, affecting approximately 1,775 people, including families, elders and persons with disabilities, including 42

Routine Proceedings

homes in Port Alberni. Without continued federal support, these households could face rents that double or triple, putting residents at risk of housing insecurity and displacement.

Provinces and territories have been calling on the federal government to renew bilateral agreements under the national housing strategy, provide long-term funding certainty and preserve existing indigenous social and affordable housing, as it is essential to addressing Canada's housing crisis and advancing reconciliation.

Petitioners are calling on the government to commit to renewing and adequately funding national housing strategy bilateral agreements before existing agreements expire to ensure that indigenous housing providers and their tenants are protected from unaffordable rent increases resulting from the expiration of federal operating agreements. Lastly, they call on the government to work with indigenous housing providers, provinces and territories to establish a long-term funding framework that preserves existing affordable indigenous housing and provides housing security for current and future tenants.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING

Dan Albas (Okanagan Lake West—South Kelowna, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today on a petition like I have not seen before, petition e-7372. This is a petition put forward by a woman whose husband, unfortunately, has succumbed to Alzheimer's. Despite his desire to receive medical assistance in dying in those kinds of cases, the current laws do not accommodate him. His family and friends have seen his situation deteriorate and have thus decided to petition their government to seek changes to the law. The family would like to see clear safeguards and advanced MAID requests that offer people dignity, compassion and choice.

I know there are people on both sides of the coin on this who struggle with these issues, but I think here in our Parliament of Canada, we can always discuss what matters most: our family and their future.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am tabling a petition today from Canadians deeply concerned about unemployment in this country. In particular, the petitioners highlight the issue of high youth unemployment. New numbers out today show youth unemployment jumping up to 13% in a context where we have the lowest labour force participation in almost 30 years.

Government Orders

The petitioners highlight how alarmingly high youth unemployment is and how training and skills development programs have not kept up with the realities of the labour market. The petitioners highlight concerns about immigration policy and the rising cost of living impacting young people and making things more challenging when it comes to jobs and also to affording essentials.

The petitioners call on the government to present a clear plan to reduce youth unemployment, developed in consultation with young Canadians, employers and educators. They want young people to have opportunity, jobs, homes and hope once again. They the government to report Parliament on progress towards job creation, training alignment and youth labour market participation.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

• (1215)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[For text of questions and responses, see Written Questions website]

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Before proceeding, the Chair would like to make a brief statement regarding an incident that occurred yesterday during the adjournment debate.

[English]

I have been made aware of an administrative error that led to confusion among the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and the Chair.

I now want to confirm that neither the member nor the parliamentary secretary was responsible for the confusion. The Chair has directed the House administration to contact the member to reschedule his adjournment proceeding slot on his intended topic. On behalf of the House administration, the Chair would like to sincerely apologize for this error and misunderstanding.

I thank all members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

FIRST NATIONS CLEAN WATER ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-37, An Act respecting water, source water, drinking water, wastewater and related infrastructure on First Nation lands, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, *kwe kwe, waachiyaah*.

I am especially pleased to speak to Bill C-37, but I do so with some regret, even a bit of bitterness, because, in my view, this debate comes far too late. For years, if not decades, the Auditor General has been issuing reports criticizing the impact of the government's inaction on the quality of life of first nations. This inaction also undermines their capacity for self-determination and has significant repercussions on the health of children, as well as on that of all first nations members.

In my view, this is clearly a fundamental right, one that is also recognized by the United Nations. In the current context, it is important to remember what has brought us to this point. The journey has been marked in particular by the pressure exerted and leadership shown on these issues by the Assembly of First Nations, or AFN, and the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador, or AFNQL. I want to highlight the work done by Lance Haymond, chief of Kebaowek First Nation in my riding, who is still fighting to protect water quality in the context of the nuclear waste disposal site at Chalk River and the consequences it could have on traditional lands. Indigenous peoples, first nations, Inuit and Métis have a responsibility to protect our shared territory. Their vision is rooted in a perspective that looks ahead to the next seven generations. This should also serve as inspiration in the context of Bill C-39, which seeks to fast-track project approvals without ensuring social licence and without free, prior and informed consultations with first nations.

Bill C-37 emerged in that context. However, as I was saying, it has come too late. We studied Bill C-61 during the last Parliament, which lasted nearly four years—three and a half years, to be exact. Why did the Liberals not make this a priority sooner? Why was it not debated in the House earlier, debated in committee and advanced through all the stages to be passed by the Senate? I have been thinking about that a lot.

At the time, I was the Bloc Québécois critic for indigenous affairs. We did extensive work on Bill C-61, which contained a number of important distinctions compared with Bill C-37, particularly because of the co-development process. The parties concerned were brought to the table from the outset. The parliamentary work was done. I am thinking in particular of the work carried out by my former NDP colleague from Nunavut, who has now crossed to the other side of the House. Ironically, she will be voting against provisions that she herself helped improve. Bill C-37 is a watered-down version of Bill C-61. Several fundamental elements have been removed, and I will return to those shortly.

Government Orders

In the context of Bill C-61, I would remind the House that we proposed many amendments and recommendations stemming from the concerns of first nations, including the AFN and the AFNQL. That work allowed us to reach a consensus. When the current Minister of Indigenous Services was appointed, the first thing I asked her to do was to reintroduce Bill C-61 as amended by the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. I think that Parliament could have passed that bill quickly, yet here we are today, more than a year and a half later, with a new bill that is only at first reading, or rather, receiving its first hour of debate. How many months or years will it take for this new bill to make it all the way through the legislative process? I am worried about that. Until we have a law in place, there will be no government accountability and, obviously, no results. We see this year after year in the Auditor General's reports, as well as in her follow-up reports on earlier recommendations. This is a huge problem.

In the meantime, the communities are suffering. The government may well say that there has been some progress and that only 35 communities are still affected, but that still leaves 35 communities having to boil their drinking water on a daily basis. In Quebec, the community of Kitchisakik did not have clean drinking water, but the Quebec government handled it. That community now has access to electricity, which allows its systems to function more effectively.

● (1220)

If the Quebec government had not stepped in, the federal government would have also failed in its responsibility to provide clean water to first nations. That was the situation we were facing two years ago when we were examining Bill C-61 in committee. I must admit that the minister of indigenous services at the time, the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, was excellent to work with. I hope I got the name of her riding right. I want to commend her for approach because it enabled us to reach a consensus that I felt was inclusive, something that we are not necessarily seeing today.

As we saw earlier in questions and comments, the government is even going so far as to justify the time the minister gave herself to hold the consultations that were never carried out. It is easy to see that this is just the government's way of wasting time. Meanwhile, the government does not have any obligation to produce results. That is the crux of the problem, which has been going on for decades. The federal government has failed to produce results when it comes to providing first nations with clean water.

Last December, the Prime Minister personally promised the Assembly of First Nations that this bill would be introduced. As first nations know, just because a bill is introduced does not mean that it will get passed. It does not guarantee results from this government. The cavalier attitude that we have been seeing in the House over the past few weeks, since the government bought itself a majority with Conservative floor crossers and the member for Nunavut, is not good for first nations. What we have been seeing since the current Prime Minister took office is the introduction of bills like Bill C-5.

What did Bill C-5 do? It eliminated the responsibility to comply with the Indian Act, which entailed the duty to consult first nations. I proposed an amendment to this bill, which I thank the Conservatives for supporting, to remove from the schedule those bills that

the government is allowed to ignore when implementing its projects of national interest or similar projects. We also need to define what is meant by national interest. That remains to be determined. Taking the Indian Act out of that schedule would stop the government from circumventing the fundamental principle of consulting first nations. Although it is extremely archaic, the Indian Act does set a baseline for the rights of first nations.

Clearly, the federal government was not happy about the Indian Act being removed from the schedule, so it tried again with Bill C-15. It removed some elements from the bill, and it is doing so again with Bill C-39 by clearly stating that nuclear energy must be the priority. As a result, this fight is going all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. I want to once again commend Lance Haymond and the Kebaowek community for their leadership in protecting the integrity of our waterways, our lands and our biodiversity.

This time, it will be much more complicated, if not impossible, to stand up for the fundamental rights of first nations, even though one of the fundamental rights of first nations is obviously access to drinking water. The reality is that Bill C-5 was passed with limited debate. I would remind the House that Bill C-15 was also passed quickly and Bill C-39 was voted on yesterday at second reading with the support of the Conservative Party. There will be a lot of work to do in committee, and it will be up to the Bloc Québécois to stand up for the rights of first nations in the context of Bill C-39.

As for Bill C-37, it is the same story. I regret not putting more pressure on the government to ensure that Bill C-61 was the version presented to the House. Actually, no, I believe I did my due diligence on this, and I believe first nations did theirs as well. I believe it is the government's refusal to listen that has caused us to lose another year, another five years, another 40 years. It is this accumulation of delays that means first nations members are once again being penalized today.

All in all, Bill C-37 is in keeping with the spirit of continuity, and I would like to emphasize that. However, some provisions that had been included in Bill C-61 have been omitted, which is a real shame.

● (1225)

However, we in the Bloc Québécois recognize the relevance of the principle underlying this approach. Access to clean, safe and reliable drinking water is a fundamental goal. First nations must have the necessary resources to manage their water services and protect their resources.

Government Orders

It was on precisely this point that I personally took action at committee to ensure that first nations' expertise is developed. It is one thing to say that they will take care of it, but that expertise needs to be developed. All too often, we have seen consulting engineering firms like SNC-Lavalin get lucrative contracts at the expense of first nations. If something breaks, it takes months for repairs to happen, because there is no local expertise. This means that people need to be trained. It means that systems need to be updated. It means that ongoing investments need to be made. Bill C-37 does not prove that the Liberals have a long-term vision for investments in that regard.

Among other things, the bill seeks to affirm first nations jurisdiction over water, source water, drinking water, waste water and related infrastructure on, in and under their lands by establishing minimum standards and mechanisms for co-operation with the various levels of government. That is an important aspect because water is under provincial jurisdiction; it is Quebec's responsibility, for example. There is a desire to find better water quality, but protecting clean water is fundamental to human survival. First nations people have a vision to protect it, as does the Government of Quebec. Partnerships exist that should not be replaced. If the government does not respect the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces, it will end up creating other mechanisms that will not solve the problem at its core.

Bill C-37 also provides for the gradual implementation of mechanisms to guarantee access to drinking water, the co-development of a funding framework and the possible creation of a first nations-led water commission. This brings me back to the debates we had in committee. Any such commission must respect both official languages. Unfortunately, when I proposed an amendment to that effect, several Liberal members and the member for Nunavut refused to support both official languages. Of course, the goal should also be to make translations available in the indigenous languages of the communities concerned, and I fully support that. However, failing to recognize French as an official language of Canada and failing to provide documents in French also has discriminatory consequences for many first nations communities in Quebec whose members are francophone. That reality was largely overlooked. I would like to point out that the committee's work ultimately resulted in a bilingual commission. Common sense prevailed, and there are mechanisms in place that have enabled us to correct what would have been a very serious error.

In its preliminary analysis, the Assembly of First Nations, or AFN, raised concerns that "the lack of commitment to the full achievement of the human right to water, limited definition of First Nations lands, weakened co-development and consultation provisions [and] reliance on 'best efforts' language". We see a lot of that. The bill often states that the government will make best efforts. That is a problem. We do not need the government to do its best. We need it to commit to doing better. It is all meaningless without that commitment. It is just empty words.

Another concern raised by the AFN was "uncertainty regarding the interaction between the right to water supply [provided for in the bill] and existing provincial water allocation regimes." What happens if the source of drinking water is not on reserve territory?

As we know, reserve boundaries were drawn so as to enclose as little area as possible, which is a problem for growing populations.

Often, as is the case in my riding, first nations occupied the land well before we did. They lived near waterways, which is only natural, particularly for the Anishinabe. However, most reserves are inland, far from first nations' ancestral lands. Some land flooded when dams were built, as was the case for the Long Point nation and the Kitcisakik community. All of this affects their direct access to water, to river water sources. Today, we are dealing with additional costs to supply water to these reserves, and we need to take that into account, but collaboration is also needed.

• (1230)

Several of the criticisms of Bill C-61 were addressed through a co-development process. I want to point that out. Although it was imperfect, it was a step forward that was not replicated in the process for Bill C-37. To me, that is a major risk. I would like to echo the remarks of Francis Verreault-Paul, Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador. He believes that Bill C-37 no longer explicitly recognizes access to drinking water as a human right. He, too, is adding his voice to the discussion. He also believes that certain elements of the bill represent a step backward compared to Bill C-61.

When I asked the minister that question earlier, she proudly stated that she is investing money and looking ahead. These problems will not be solved. If we refuse to acknowledge the nature of the problems and the setbacks we are facing, we are dooming ourselves to repeat the same mistakes. If we doom ourselves to repeat the same mistakes, in the end, everyone loses. It will cost taxpayers more, and first nations will not have access to the safe, high-quality drinking water to which they are entitled. These are no trivial matters.

I talked about Bill C-5. I talked about the fact that we need to establish collaborative mechanisms between governments, especially provincial governments, and the jurisdictions involved. Funding is a key issue. We have to consider what is good for communities when it comes to maintaining, renewing and upgrading infrastructure. We have to consider skills development, consultation mechanisms, joint management, the coordination of regulatory regimes, long-term funding and the meaningful authority that first nations will have with respect to concrete protection measures. We need predictable, long-term financial resources, along with a clear and respectful relationship. All of that is there.

I will return to Bill C-61. It established a clearer definition of protection zones. Based on what I see in Bill C-37, that concerns me. This aspect will have to be updated in committee. The bill talks about "best efforts". We could change that to "commitments to do better". That is essential.

I would like to revisit the Auditor General's findings so that we have a clear understanding of the situation we are starting from as we discuss this issue. Based on her report tabled in 2021, she stated in 2025, "Although the number of [long term drinking water advisories] has declined, 35 advisories remained as of April 1, 2025." Nine of those drinking water advisories were issued in the following fiscal year. Clearly, this remains a problem today. We need long-term solutions, yet we are still far from certain that the areas of progress identified by the Auditor General will deliver any results. Quite frankly, that is deeply disappointing.

I sat on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. In that context, I wanted to ensure that these challenges could be addressed. A report adopted by the committee in June will have to be tabled in the House so that we may one day debate it.

Before the debate even begins, we have to look at the government's shortcomings. I am thinking of Bill C-10, which establishes a commissioner for modern treaty implementation. This position is only needed because the government has failed to live up to its obligations with respect to first nations. Do we need to do the same thing here, that is, appoint a drinking water commissioner to finally ensure that someone can actually access the inner workings of the government, particularly within the Department of Indigenous Services, to get the information needed to hold this government to account?

Bill C-37 raises a lot of questions. It will need to be improved in committee, but it would have been so simple and so much more efficient to build on the former Bill C-61, which had consensus and could have been passed very quickly.

• (1235)

Jacques Ramsay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, when watersheds are shared, the legislation provides a framework for collaboration that allows first nations, provinces, territories and the federal government to work together while respecting existing jurisdictions.

Does my hon. colleague from Abitibi—Témiscamingue see this approach as beneficial and likely to ensure that the law stands the test of time?

Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, that is the great challenge. If the past is any indication, the trust that first nations themselves place in the government on this fundamental issue is low. The government has a responsibility to demonstrate consistency, predictability, leadership and the most fundamental form of respect, which is enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I have concerns in that regard, because the mechanisms have not been agreed upon in advance by first nations members themselves. All of this is already set out in the first draft of the bill. Now that the government has a majority, what we are essentially being told is that the government is unlikely to change anything and we will have to work with what has already been decided. That is not how it works.

[English]

Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that right now in Quebec, there are no boil water advisories.

It is a region that maybe other regions can learn from, with collaboration between municipal governments and provincial governments.

I am wondering if my colleague can highlight some of the principled partnerships that he has seen that first nations can learn from in order to create great utilities and critical infrastructure, like water in Quebec.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, you are doing a good job; I just want to acknowledge that.

I would like to thank my colleague from Edmonton Northwest for his comments and for his work in strengthening first nations' capacity for self-determination. This is a principle that the Government of Quebec has recognized and put into practice for many years. Take, for example, the Cree community. The Minister of Indigenous Services was once their grand chief. This community has benefited from the peace of the braves. It has benefited from agreements with the government for some fifty years. Those agreements have brought investment into the community, but more importantly, they have helped build local capacity. I had the opportunity to visit Chisasibi this summer. What struck me was the tremendous amount of work being done to modernize infrastructure while ensuring that the community remains in control of its own development. That is their key to success and strong relationships.

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague and friend on his excellent speech. He clearly knows his subject well. He is passionate about it. We learn a lot from him. I think he paints a clear picture of the challenges and everything that needs to be done.

He was referring to the last Parliament and traced all of this back some 40 years. I would like to go back about 10 years instead. At the time, I was the Bloc Québécois finance critic. During discussions about our budget requests with then minister of finance, Bill Morneau, I asked him to address the issue of access to safe drinking water in all first nations communities across Canada. He assured me that this was in line with their priorities, and that if we were committed to it, his government would resolve the situation. When I reviewed his budget, I could see that the money was there. However, at the end of the year, when I looked at the lapsed appropriations, the money was still there; it had not been spent, and nothing had been resolved.

How is it that, 10 years later, even though the government has announced the necessary funding and expressed its willingness to take action, the issue still has not been resolved?

Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, I also want to point out that I am speaking on behalf of my colleague from Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan and the indigenous communities in her riding.

Privilege

In this context, my colleague is right. That is what the Auditor General's many reports have shown, year after year, indeed decade after decade. One of the first things that fascinated me when I arrived in the House of Commons was this tendency to congratulate ourselves on a budget, to pat ourselves on the back for being so generous, yet a year later, balanced budgets often end up resting on funds that were never spent, effectively at the expense of first nations. All the while, they continue to be promised tens of billions of dollars.

Why is that money not being spent? It is because local expertise is not being taken into account. Expertise on the ground is not being developed. The government is not respecting the expertise of band councils. The government thinks that all it needs to do is put money in a budget and everything will be fixed, but that is not the case. The same is true for housing. The same is true for so many files. The government needs to develop the expertise of first nations in a respectful manner.

• (1240)

Tim Watchorn (Les Pays-d'en-Haut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has an excellent grasp of the issues we are discussing.

I would like him to talk a bit more about workforce development. When it comes to drinking water and waste water in municipalities, they are already struggling to find enough skilled staff to manage these systems.

I would like him to talk about how Bill C-37 will help increase the workforce in first nations communities so they can manage their own drinking water and waste water systems.

Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, for me, this is one of the blind spots. It is one of the aspects that I do not have much confidence in. It is also one of the most fundamental aspects that we worked on in committee back when we were examining Bill C-61. We looked at how to develop this workforce because it was not part of the spirit of the bill, and that is why I wanted to push to use the version of Bill C-61 that was passed as a starting point.

We also introduced concepts such as epistemological data to ensure that first nations have access to the information that the federal government has but that the band council does not. If something is affecting water quality and is making people sick and one community is affected more than another, health care professionals and the federal government both know about it, but the community itself does not and cannot take action. That is one example of how we need to work together to establish data-sharing mechanisms that will help with first nations self-determination.

[English]

Billy Morin: Mr. Speaker, the minister earlier and the Liberals have made so many announcements worth billions of dollars and have done many things. This bill coincided with an announcement of multiple billions of dollars to tackle this issue, but the issue still remains after 11 years of broken promises.

I wonder if my colleague feels confident that the Liberal government will spend that money effectively on behalf of first nations and taxpayers in order to solve the root cause of this issue.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, I am counting on my colleague from Edmonton Northwest to be the watchdog on this issue when witnesses come before the indigenous and northern affairs committee to speak on these issues. Access to a source of drinking water will also be a major issue.

My colleague has a responsibility, as do all the members in the House, to think about first nations as well, because they will be the ones responsible for implementing this. There is a fundamental duty to listen. A ministerial tour that serves merely to conceal the step backward from Bill C-61 to Bill C-37 is not enough. There is a duty of vigilance, and I am counting on my colleague to uphold it.

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is something that struck me in my colleague's speech. He said that Bill C-37 did not take into account the work that was done on Bill C-61 in committee, where improvements were made. My colleague gave us a lot of examples of that. Why does he think the government did not keep these improvements? Is it just complacency? Is it because the government is not doing its homework?

Does my colleague believe that all the work done in committee on Bill C-61 will have to be redone and repeated for Bill C-37?

Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his remarks and for his consistent sensitivity to these issues, particularly as reflected in his close relationship with the Atikamekw nation. He raises an important point, namely the work that went into the legislation. I also want to bring the concern of the Assembly of First Nations into the discussion. The gradual implementation of the human right to safe drinking water must absolutely be recognized. That is fundamental. We cannot achieve the desired outcome if we do not include first nations, if this project is not developed in partnership with them. We failed to do so in the budget implementation. We have wasted time, which means first nations are not seeing the results they deserve. This should have been resolved decades ago. It still has not been. Urgent action is needed.

* * *

• (1245)

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED PREMATURE DISCLOSURE OF BILL C-40

Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to the question of privilege raised earlier this week.

Data and details from Bill C-40 were leaked. For those listening, what does that mean? Bill C-40 relates to national defence. To begin with, we should recognize that this is an important matter. However, journalists were granted privileged access to parts of this bill even before it was introduced here in the House, so before members of Parliament, who were elected by the public, had a chance to review it.

Paragraph 3.14 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states as follows:

The premature disclosure of bills which have not yet been read in the House may be a breach of privilege. There is a well-established convention of parliamentary practice whereby members must be the first to be informed of the substance of legislative measures.

It seems to me that it is essential to ensure that the members elected by Canadians are able to be the first to analyze the issues that are presented in the House, such as motions and bills, so we can be the eyes, ears and voices of our constituents and ensure that we can at least give them correct information. Our role is to analyze and share information with Canadians and represent them.

The Prime Minister is showing signs of a trend. He seems to be on roll when it comes to his House of Commons attendance, to say the least. This week, he rose in the House to tell us that he is new here and not familiar with the rules. That is no excuse. Ignorance of the rules is no excuse for not following them. According to a long-standing code, members must be the first to know what goes on in the House of Commons because what we do here matters. Failure to follow these procedures undermines democracy.

We live in a time where people are starting to have less and less confidence in our institutions and where there are more autocracies in the world than democracies. I think that we should at least be able to expect the Prime Minister and his team to show some respect for democracy. It is not right for the government to give inside information to certain journalists to shape public opinion and get a bit of head start so that the opposition does not have time to do its work.

We know that and it happened again recently. I will close with this. The Prime Minister walked away from the negotiations with the United States. We were never told why. We do not know what was left on the table and we parliamentarians have no say in the matter. The Prime Minister is building closer ties with the European Union and, at the end of last month, he went to Montreal to make an announcement about potential agreements with the EU. No one in the House knows what is going on. He said that his members are just there to vote and, unfortunately, he did not realize that he was being recorded at the time. The independent commissioners are beginning to sound the alarm and saying that he is becoming less and less transparent.

I think that someone on the other side should remind him that this is not Canada Inc. and he is not the CEO of a company. He must show respect for democracy. That is supposed to happen in the House. I think we need to get back to the basics.

[English]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): Is the parliamentary secretary rising on the same question of privilege?

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I was concerned about it being commentary rather than a clear demonstration of a violation, but it looks like the member is done, so I will withdraw my comment.

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): I thank the member for Montmorency—Charlevoix for his comments on

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this question of privilege. The Chair will take them under advisement.

* * *

[English]

FIRST NATIONS CLEAN WATER ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-37, An Act respecting water, source water, drinking water, wastewater and related infrastructure on First Nation lands, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, it is an enormous honour for me to split my time with a member of another party, but I want to stop for a moment and just say that the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre, with whom I will be splitting my time, is a champion for indigenous rights. I am honoured to share my time with her.

I am rising now to speak to Bill C-37, the bill that, as we know, is under debate today, an act respecting water, source water, drinking water, waste water and related infrastructure on first nations lands. If this sounds familiar and reads as a familiar piece of legislation for those of us who served before the last election, that is because it is virtually identical to what initially came before the House as Bill C-61.

Bill C-61 received its last reading on December 2, 2024, and it had at that point been amended. It had gone through committee and was ready at report stage. It was ready to go, in other words. First reading was far before December 2. By December 2, it had already gone to committee and come back to us. It was one of those pieces of legislation that unfortunately, as the expression goes, although it is not an expression but the technical terminology, died on the Order Paper. That was on January 6, 2025, when former prime minister Justin Trudeau prorogued the House. All the bills, of course, as a result of that, died.

Bill C-61 was so far along and so important, along with Bill C-33, on port safety and railway safety. There were a number of other bills, such as Bill C-3, which we had come back to. Bill C-33 seems to be gone forever, but we need to bring it back.

I wrote a letter to the new Prime Minister to say that there were bills that died on the Order Paper that had substantial cross-party support, and asked him to please bring them back soon. One of the ones I mentioned was this one, Bill C-61, which was called the safe drinking water act for indigenous peoples and first nations, as well as Bill C-33. We put a lot of work into that, and that was also ready at report stage.

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It took a while, obviously. March 9, 2025, was when he became Prime Minister. I wrote and said that these bills should come back soon, and that if they came back soon, we could get back to them soon. They have already gone through committee. They have already gone through study, etc.

Here we are. It is October, more than a year later, in 2026, and in many ways, an identical bill has come back to us now as Bill C-37. However, it is not entirely identical. There are some changes, and that is where I see a slipping away, an erosion, of respect from the new government toward indigenous rights, indigenous peoples and the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, UNDRIP.

Here is the change that occurs. The other erosion of respect for indigenous rights, which we were already debating this week, is in Bill C-39, and last year, in June 2025, in Bill C-5, which fundamentally undermine indigenous rights in terms of free, prior informed consent.

This bill is a little different, and it is worth noticing the only place I have found in which the two pieces of legislation differ. In Bill C-61, clause 3.1 looks very similar to what we find now in clause 3. Clause 3.1 of the former bill, which died on the Order Paper, Bill C-61, said clearly:

It is recognized and affirmed that it is a human right of every individual on First Nations land to have access to clean and safe drinking water in accordance with this Act.

• (1250)

[Translation]

It is the same in French.

[English]

This bill still has this clause. If one were reading fast, one could say it is in there. In Bill C-37, clause 3 is in regard to the “Right to Clean and Safe Drinking Water”. Here is the little change:

It is declared to be the policy of the Government of Canada to further the progressive realization, for individuals on First Nation lands, of the human right to safe drinking water, as protected by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

It is interesting how quickly a right can disappear. In December 2024, the government was prepared to recognize that it is a human right of every individual on first nations land to have access to clean and safe drinking water. Poof, there goes the right. Now, it would be “the policy of the Government of Canada”, and what kinds of weasel words these are, “to further the progressive realization, for individuals on First Nation lands, of the human right to safe drinking water”.

It so happens that I have practised law, but I think one does not have to have practised law to notice that having a human right to something is a clear, definitive statement of a right they can exercise. It is not a teeny difference to say that we have a policy “to further the progressive realization”.

Clean and safe drinking water is a fundamental human right recognized globally. For first nations people in Canada, it is part of our shameful history that we are the sole federal jurisdiction yet to ensure that indigenous people of our country have safe drinking water, and we failed abysmally. That is not a story. It is a litany of fail-

ures that I need to repeat, including those such as Grassy Narrows and northern Alberta.

I remember that, before I was in the Green Party or even belonged to any political party, as a lawyer I attended the environmental assessment hearings on the extension of Jackpine Mine. I was at Fort McMurray. I will never forget hearing a first nations witness say that they used to go in the bush and were able to put a kettle in a stream, bring it back, put it on a campfire and make tea. They were not able to do that anymore, because the water did not taste good.

That is a result of the oil sands operations in that region: the continual daily leak of tailings ponds and the polyaromatic hydrocarbons and other bitumen-related residues that got into not just the water but the ecosystem of that entire region. I will never forget the evidence of that witness. He also said that if a deer goes into the bush there, it has to pack a lunch. In terms of drinking water, he could not make tea from the stream on the land.

I really support Bill C-61 as it then was, and I think we need to amend Bill C-37. I am sure we will hear detailed suggestions from my friend, the member for Winnipeg Centre, in a moment.

How can members of the House just accept what changed between one Parliament and another? These are not slight wording changes. I am so deeply distressed by the government, which, as far as our friends in the Conservative Party see it, is an uninterrupted Liberal government that we have had for 11 years. I feel as though we have had two different parties in this place. There was something in the past that seemed to be more committed to reconciliation.

Its commitment to climate action may have been performative, but I have to say I kind of miss the words. I also miss the policies. There has been a sharp difference, and perhaps the difference between Bill C-61 of 2024 and Bill C-37 of 2026 is the sharpest proof of difference with the person the hon. parliamentary secretary, the member for Winnipeg North, keeps telling us is the newly elected Prime Minister. I keep being pedantic and pointing out that we do not elect prime ministers in this country but elect individual members of Parliament.

However, this is not only a different government. I think it is a different party, and I lament the difference.

• (1255)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the issue of water quality has been at the forefront in many ways, including when I served in the Manitoba legislature. I have had a long relationship with the national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Cindy Woodhouse, who has been a very strong advocate in dealing with water, so I am somewhat familiar with the urgency of the issue. Before us today, we do have legislation that would be a significant step forward.

I am hoping that it will ultimately go to committee, and I am sure the member will be able to continue to express her thoughts in regard to the issue she has raised today once it gets to committee. I would like get her thoughts in regard to whether the Green Party would see fit to support the legislation itself.

Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I want to quote a former Liberal environment minister and former Liberal federal member of Parliament, the Hon. Clifford Lincoln, a strong Liberal who cared about rights. When he resigned his seat in the Bourassa cabinet, he gave a speech in the Assemblée Nationale du Québec, where he said, “rights are rights”.

This is a scandal.

• (1300)

Billy Morin (Edmonton Northwest, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier my colleague spoke about “performative” with respect to the government. One of the biggest criticisms I have heard since the beginning of the new session of Parliament is that, as she mentioned, it took more than a year to reintroduce a bill that has some important distinctions from the last bill but in a lot of ways, probably in the vast majority of the bill, remains the same.

I am wondering if the member could expand on why, she thinks, the government is doing things differently all of a sudden as opposed to just following up with Bill C-61 right out of the gate.

Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, obviously I do not know. I would love to really understand the motivations of this change in government. From all appearances, indigenous rights, climate and nature are no longer important to it. These issues, peoples and ecosystems are seen as obstacles to bulldozers.

Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have to agree with my hon. colleague.

The government claims to be the new Liberal government. I absolutely believe that. It is no wonder that former prime minister Stephen Harper called this, in the news, our Prime Minister's ideological error.

One thing I noticed is that the Liberals are completely in violation of the rights of indigenous peoples. I do not really see a difference, in terms of their corporate agenda for the billionaire class, with the fast-tracking of Bill C-39 at the same time as they are fast-tracking Bill C-37. Could my hon. colleague expand on that?

Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, it makes me heartsick, because I did feel that we were making a lot of progress. Obviously as leader of the Green Party, I was never in a cheering line for everything that was done under former prime minister Justin Trudeau, but I did have a sense that there was a deeper understanding of the impera-

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tive of reconciliation. Reconciliation has to be the work primarily of settler culture people.

We are all treaty peoples, one way or another, but we have an obligation as settler people to actually live up to our words. The switcheroo of words between Bill C-61 and Bill C-37 will undermine any confidence indigenous peoples, first nations, Métis or Inuit have in the idea that settler culture people keep their word.

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands for her comments. I would like to know what she thinks of the phrase “best efforts”. It keeps cropping up in the bill. How much confidence does she have in this oil-friendly government, which says it will do its best without any concrete commitment from the minister?

Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, I really have no confidence in the current government when it comes to keeping its promises. Their promises are just like everyone else's—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The hon. member for Winnipeg Centre.

[English]

Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, today I rise to speak to Bill C-37, the first nations clean water act. This represents another attempt by the Liberal government to erode indigenous rights while trying to disguise it as progress.

Alongside the violations to the clean water rights in this bill, we are seeing similarly shocking rights violations in Bill C-39, which completely undermines the constitutional duty to consult and accommodate indigenous peoples, along with other critical environmental protections and workers' charter-protected right to strike. That is why Bill C-39 was getting push-back just yesterday, in fact, from whole regions; whole indigenous peoples and first nations, including the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, the Chiefs of Ontario, the APNQL, the BCAFN and the NAN; along with unions like CLC, CUPE and Unifor; and countless environmental organizations.

Water is life. It carries our stories and nourishes our lands. It sustains our children and gives us the future we owe to the next generation. Just today, I was joined by indigenous youth who have never in their lifetime had access to clean drinking water, which is a basic right and dignity, and Bill C-37 continues to violate their basic human right to clean water. Without clean water, there is no health, no dignity, no sovereignty and, in fact, no future.

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Access to clean drinking water is a fundamental human right protected under international law and confirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly article 25, which confirms the right of indigenous peoples to “maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned [or] used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas”.

In spite of mentioning many articles in the United Nations declaration, it is no coincidence that the Liberal government has conveniently left that article out, nor is it any coincidence that even in the time since this legislation was tabled, first nations continue to be fought in courts to dispute their right to clean, safe drinking water. Lawyers have claimed that the backtracking of commitments to first nations in Bill C-39 and Bill C-37 is another deliberate attempt to support the fight against first nations in courts.

I would like to remind the Canadian public that the Liberals only tabled Bill C-37 due to a legally binding court order. However, after years of broken promises, and ongoing shame felt by folks across the country about ongoing boil water advisories in first nations, the government has produced a bill that weakens indigenous jurisdiction instead of strengthening it. In fact, the bill denies first nations the tools needed to guarantee safe water by limiting the authority to protect water sources only on reserve. As we all know, water does not stop at the reserve boundary. It flows. It moves through watersheds, across territories and through lands where our treaty and aboriginal titles exist.

Bill C-37 does not respect aboriginal title and treaty lands, in fact, defining “First Nation lands” as “lands of a First Nation that are referred to in Class 24 of section 91 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* and includes water and source water on, in and under those lands.”

Bill C-37 is clear in stating explicitly that the lands it considers under first nations' jurisdiction “do not include lands over which Aboriginal title is claimed by a First Nation or has been confirmed by a court.”

• (1305)

This limitation obliges first nations to negotiate with municipalities, provinces, territories and the Government of Canada over source water protection outside the reserve boundary. Are we going to see more crises like in Grassy Narrows and Attawapiskat, whose water was contaminated by industries that were located outside Indian Act reserves? Yes we will.

Treaty and aboriginal title are protected under subsection 35(1) and subsection 35(3) of the Constitution and affirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Our rights extend beyond the boundaries of the reserve and are connected to our lands, territories, waters and resources. By excluding aboriginal title and treaty lands, this legislation would leave first nations responsible for the safety of our waters while denying us our inherent jurisdiction to protect the sources that sustain our communities. This is where the connection between Bill C-37, Bill C-5 and Bill C-39 becomes clear.

Last year, the Liberal government tabled Bill C-5, which was rushed through Parliament to create a so-called framework for fast-

tracking so-called projects of national interest. Bill C-39, in fact, goes even further, attacking all environmental protections, indigenous rights and workers' rights, and giving king powers to ministers for overriding constitutional protections. I would like to remind the Prime Minister that the government's current approach does not even satisfy the prior requirement of free, prior and informed consent.

International standards are clear that indigenous peoples must be meaningfully consulted before major projects are made. When the federal government unilaterally determines a project that is in the so-called national interest and then only initiates consultation, a foundational decision has already been imposed. This is not about whether we support development or not. This is about upholding the right to free, prior and informed consent.

Bill C-37 would also remove explicit recognition of the human right to safe water contained in an earlier ideation of this legislation, replacing it with “progressive realization” of that right. Lawyer Michael Rosenberg has confirmed that the use of this term has everything to do, in his words, “to continue to fight First Nations in court and stand up and say, ‘There is no right and we have no obligations.’”

When the Minister of Indigenous Services talks about progressive realization when it comes to the human right to clean water, does that mean nations that have been left impoverished will potentially have to wait until they have the capacity while the Canadian government and big corporations get rich off our lands, territories and resources? I wonder if the Liberal government would be so bold if it was Winnipeg or Calgary or Ottawa to so-called progressively realize that right?

The Canadian charter guarantees the rights and freedoms of all peoples regardless of race, national or ethnic origin. We do not have a right to a comparable right under the charter. We have an equal right to clean drinking water, just as any other human being in the country.

I say to every first nation, Inuit community, Métis government, ally, labour organization, environmental movement and Canadian who believes in justice that now is the time to stand together. Now is the time to act. We must defend our lands, waters, territories and resources. It is not for ourselves, but for the youth who have joined me today in the House of Commons and for every generation to come, because water is life. Life is not negotiable and neither are indigenous rights.

• (1310)

[Translation]

Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Winnipeg Centre for her ongoing commitment to first nations' rights and to ensuring that their voices are heard, respected and recognized.

Of course, this is one of the problems we have with Bill C-37. I would like to hear her talk about mobilization and how first nations and their leaders are receiving this bill. I would remind members that the previous version of this bill was co-developed, whereas this one stems essentially from the wishes of the Minister of Indigenous Services and the Prime Minister, who wanted to intervene to remove some of first nations' fundamental human rights.

[English]

Leah Gazan: Madam Speaker, I certainly cannot speak on behalf of all first nations people in the country. What I can say as a legislator is that the Liberal government is treating the duty to consult and accommodate and free, prior and informed consent as optional constitutional rights. These are not options for the government. It has done that certainly with this bill, where there has been a very clear indication from first nations and indigenous leaders, particularly in this case of the water bill for first nations leaders, that they were not consulted on this bill.

I do not know any first nations leader or person, including me, who accepts that I have a comparable right to other people in this country to drink clean water. That is violent. It reeks of ripping from indigenous people the most basic dignity in this country: the right to clean water.

• (1315)

[Translation]

Jacques Ramsay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to know the member for Winnipeg Centre's thoughts. There is about \$4.6 billion in funding associated with this legislation. That is a lot of money. In fact, it is the largest investment that Canada has ever made for clean water for first nations.

Does that not say something? Can my colleague tell us what she thinks about this funding? Is that not a strong indication that this government wants to advance the cause of clean water for first nations?

[English]

Leah Gazan: Madam Speaker, that is how sneaky the Liberals are. I want to remind the member across the way that it is a court-ordered amount that the government is obliged to spend. I would also like to remind the member that first nations leaders, including the AFN, have been very clear that it is billions of dollars short to equate the cost of ensuring the right to clean drinking water on first nations. I say shame on the government. It is politicizing the right of our kids to clean drinking water.

Ellis Ross (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Liberal government here, as in many other acts and bills, will always talk about billions and billions of dollars. In this case, we are talking about \$4 billion going toward clean drinking water. However, all the studies say that 43% of every dollar that goes to-

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ward these types of initiatives ends up in administration or lawyers or consultants.

Does the member have any comments with regard to that?

Leah Gazan: Madam Speaker, what I can say is we know that the funding is inadequate. The fact is that the government has put cutbacks on Indigenous Services Canada. We know we have not even recovered from the time of Paul Martin when he put a 2% cap on first nations.

I do not want to talk about budget cuts, but I will say is that I hope my Conservative colleagues will support the right and recognition and confirm aboriginal title that has been confirmed even by the court to make sure that first nations have a right to protect source waters and aquifers as waters flow into our nations.

Dane Lloyd (Parkland, CPC): Madam Speaker, it has been a very interesting debate today on Bill C-37, the proposed first nations clean water act. There is a saying: It feels like déjà vu all over again. Sadly, today is another day where we are debating yet another bill about getting indigenous peoples in this country access to the safe and clean drinking water they have every right to have access to. I think it is a tremendous failure of the government since 2015. It promised to end boil water advisories, and the fact that we are still seeing widespread boil water advisories, which are leading to disease like hepatitis A and other bacterial infections across indigenous communities across this country, is a real shame.

I would like to also start by saying that I am extremely proud to be the MP for Parkland. Parkland resides within the Treaty 6 territory, which includes first nations such as Enoch Cree Nation, Paul First Nation, as well as the legacy of the Michel Band, which unfortunately, back in the 1950s, and in a very controversial and what I would say probably illegal action, lost its first nations status. They were enfranchised. I think it might be the only case in this country. I know that members of the Michel Band are still attempting to get their treaty status back to this day.

We are here discussing clean water and indigenous rights. I have been speaking with indigenous peoples in my area and speaking with Chief Cody Thomas of Enoch Cree Nation. I have been working with them for years to find ways to address the need for clean drinking water. A lot of the high-profile cases are related to very rural and very remote communities, but they are not limited. Enoch Cree Nation is a nation that is situated right next to Edmonton, and until recently, it did not have access to drinking water from the city of Edmonton. I know it was a very hard fight, but now Enoch Cree Nation is getting clean drinking water from Edmonton.

Government Orders

The fact that a first nation that is literally right next to a major urban area in this country did not have access to clean drinking water until very recently I think makes people realize how big the challenge is with getting it to first nations in very rural and remote areas. That being said, there are still areas of Enoch Cree Nation, as it is a rural community in many places, where homes are reliant on well water. I know my family farm is right next to Enoch Cree Nation, and we are on well water.

Since the 1950s, there have been many abandoned legacy oil and gas wells and orphaned oil and gas wells. A number of years ago, during a very low period in oil prices, the Liberal government put forward a policy and put forward about \$1 billion to try to stimulate the oil services industry in Alberta into cleaning up some of these orphaned and abandoned wells. I think that was a good policy. However, there are a lot of first nations that have these wells. I believe that in Enoch Cree Nation there are over 200 abandoned oil wells. These oil wells risk contaminating groundwater. There are arsenic risks.

Unfortunately, when the government announced that program, there was \$137 million left unspent. I put forward a letter to the Minister of Finance at the time, arguing that that money should be re-profiled to support first nations in cleaning up orphaned and abandoned oil wells, so they could protect their groundwater, their drinking water. Unfortunately, the government chose not to deploy the \$137 million. I thought that could have gone a long way to supporting primarily Alberta first nations that are dealing with this very important issue.

I also want to raise another topic. First nations members in my area came to me about part of this discussion we are having today, which is settlements. We are talking about \$4.6 billion. It was rightly stated that a lot of this money is coming because of court cases the government has lost. I think a lot of Canadians are wondering, when we are talking about these billions of dollars, where all of this money is going. I am very concerned, as first nations representatives come to my office to talk to me and it has been increasingly widespread in the media that the funds from these settlements are being appropriated by law firms that are supposedly acting on behalf of these first nations. These monies are not getting into the hands of the first nations people who need those funds.

• (1320)

This is not an isolated case, and in one case, it is clear that the government had actually been helping to facilitate what I would call the indentured servitude of a first nation. Indigenous Services Canada hand-picked a first nations board, unelected, and this first nations board was encouraged to sign on with one of these law firms. The senior negotiator for the Government of Canada working at ISC, an employee of the Government of Canada, who got this hand-picked first nation to sign on with this law firm quit the government afterward, and guess what. They were appointed as senior legal counsel for that law firm. This is a conflict of interest, and the government allowed it to happen.

I want to give Canadians an example of just how bad some of these cases can be. These first nations are signing very complex legal agreements that contain poison pills that are not normal in the legal sphere, whereby if a first nation even tries to seek any form of

independent legal advice to ask if the deal it is receiving is a good deal or not, it will be punished by the law firm. Money will be clawed back and members will be punished for speaking out against the law firm.

In Saskatchewan, courts have found that these firms have been overbilling these first nations. When we are talking about supporting first nations, the government needs to ensure that there is accountability so that first nations are actually getting the money.

Some of the cases that I am hearing are truly egregious. What we are seeing is the term “irrevocable directive”, whereby a first nation is signing away its rights to receive financial compensation in settlements from the government so that the money will go directly to a law firm rather than to the first nation. The billing practices are then not transparent, and Canadians and first nations are seeing this. They are watching their rights being undermined, and the Government of Canada is not doing anything about it.

When we talk about ensuring that we get fresh water for first nations and that the Government of Canada is being fair to first nations, we need to ensure that there is accountability in the process to ensure that first nations are not being exploited by any third party actors and that they are fully aware, without intimidation, of their legal right to seek independent legal advice when they are signing agreements that involve their rights.

We are talking about very high-profile cases in Alberta, where trust funds contain tens of millions of dollars, possibly over hundreds of millions of dollars, in funds that are intended to go to first nations. These are subject to ongoing litigation, but the fact that we are in a place in this country where first nations have to fight not only the government but the law firms that are supposed to be representing them to get what they justly deserve is a key part of the problem. If we do not deal with that part of the problem, we will continue to see cases of first nations not getting the financial support they deserve to get their water infrastructure and the resources needed to deal with first nations health care. We are talking about cows and plows agreements.

We need to ensure that the government is holding all players, including itself, to account. I will certainly be fighting with my Conservative colleagues to hold the government to account to ensure that first nations and indigenous peoples have their rights respected and that they get access to the clean water they deeply deserve and have long deserved. It is long overdue that they get those resources.

• (1325)

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I am concerned that between Bill C-61 of 2024 and Bill C-37, the loudest interventions against rights to safe drinking water came from some of the premiers. I am wondering if my hon. colleague from Parkland has any thoughts on how a government can be held accountable in a Parliament when it pays more attention to premiers than to the operations of Westminster parliamentary democracy.

Dane Lloyd: Madam Speaker, we need to respect the rights of first nations. We need to ensure that first nations have a government that will have their back and will not constantly appeal and fight them in court, so they can get the clean water they deeply deserve. It is about partnership and about ensuring accountability as well.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it, I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That the question be now put on Bill C-37: first nations clean water act, at second reading

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): All those opposed to the hon. parliamentary secretary'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)

• (1330)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): The question is on the main motion.

[English]

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.

An hon. member: On division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): I declare the motion carried on division. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): It being 1:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business, as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[Translation]

NATIONAL STRATEGY ON FLOOD AND DROUGHT FORECASTING ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-241, An Act to establish a national strategy respecting flood and drought forecasting, as reported (with amendments) from the committee.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): There being no motions at report stage, the House will now proceed, with-

Private Members' Business

out debate, to the putting of the question on the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

[English]

Tatiana Auguste (Terrebonne, Lib.) moved that the bill be concurred in.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): 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.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, my understanding is that we are just going to carry it. We are anticipating that we will get into debate right away. We request that it be carried.

(Motion agreed to)

[Translation]

Tatiana Auguste (Terrebonne, Lib.) moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise again today at third reading stage of Bill C-241, which seeks to establish a national strategy for flood and drought forecasting.

Since I introduced this bill in the House, we have had the opportunity to discuss it with our colleagues, hear from various experts and look more closely at several important issues when it was studied by the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. I would like to thank the members of the committee for their work, as well as the witnesses who took the time to share their knowledge and recommendations. I also want to sincerely thank Dr. John Pomeroy from the University of Saskatchewan for his expertise and his valuable contribution to this bill. I am also grateful to my colleague, the member for Lac-Saint-Louis, for working on this bill with me.

When I began this process, what I wanted most was to address a very real concern: What can we do to make sure our communities are better prepared for floods and droughts? In my riding of Terrebonne, flooding is not a remote risk. The 2017 and 2019 floods reached my riding and highlighted the vulnerability of certain waterfront areas. In January 2018, rising waters on the Rivière des Mille Îles caused flooding in a number of homes in the Côte de Terrebonne area, forcing municipal authorities to declare a flood.

Private Members' Business

We know that these events can significantly impact families, businesses, farmers and municipalities. We also know that Canada has extensive scientific expertise in this area. However, there is still work to be done to better coordinate our efforts and facilitate access to reliable hydrological forecasts. In many Canadian communities, anticipating risk is essential for protecting our infrastructure, supporting municipal planning and, most of all, keeping residents safe. That was the goal I had in mind when I introduced Bill C-241. I am not claiming that we can prevent natural disasters. I am proposing an approach that will allow us to better understand needs, strengthen collaboration among the various stakeholders, and look for ways to improve hydrological forecasting in Canada.

The context in which we are discussing this bill also deserves our attention. The commissioner of the environment and sustainable development released a report last May on flood hazard mapping in Canada. This report contains findings that should concern us all. According to the commissioner, roughly 80% of Canada's highly populated areas are located, at least partially, in flood hazard zones. He also points out that, between 2016 and 2025, our government spent an average of \$230 million a year on post-flood relief. These figures illustrate the financial consequences of such disasters, but they do not tell the whole story of how these events affect people's lives. When a family has to leave their home, when a business has to close temporarily or when a municipality has to repair damaged roads and infrastructure, the impact goes far beyond the immediate costs.

The report also notes the challenges associated with producing and distributing flood hazard maps. The commissioner also observes that the information available is not always easily accessible or user-friendly for those who need it most. The commissioner's report reminds us of the importance of having reliable data, sharing it more effectively and ensuring that the information produced can truly support decision-making. These concerns align with the objective of my bill.

Canada already has considerable expertise in the field of hydrology. Our universities, researchers and water management agencies are doing vital work to better understand the phenomena affecting our waterways and watersheds. Several provinces also have their own monitoring and forecasting systems, tailored to their geographic realities and responsibilities. The challenge, therefore, is not to start from scratch, but to determine how these efforts can be combined and better coordinated.

Waterways do not follow administrative boundaries, and hydrological events can affect multiple municipalities, provinces or territories. When information is collected in one region, it may also be useful in another region. That is why it is to look at how to improve data compatibility, promote data sharing, and strengthen ties between different forecasting networks.

However, I want to be very clear: Bill C-241 is not intended to take responsibilities away from the provinces or to replace their current systems. Rather, it aims to establish a framework for collaboration that recognizes existing expertise and assesses opportunities for improvement at the national level.

During my testimony before the committee, I had the opportunity to explain that differences among observation networks, measuring

instruments, and analytical methods can complicate information sharing.

● (1335)

I also emphasized that better coordination must involve respect for one another's jurisdictions. It is easier to share information when we all speak the same language.

Among the amendments adopted, one specifies that the strategy must consider measures that the Government of Canada may take in response to the assessments set out in the bill. In particular, it refers to the preparation of a proposal for the establishment of a co-operative, national hydrological and water resources forecasting service and system based on the federal-provincial distributed model of the national hydrometric program.

This reference to the national hydrometric program is particularly relevant because it paves the way for an approach based on co-operation rather than centralization. Bill C-241 instead calls on the government to examine needs, assess opportunities and put forward measures that could be implemented in collaboration with relevant partners.

One aspect I would particularly like to highlight today is the importance of working together to tackle the risks of flooding and drought. Although these two phenomena are different in nature, they present many of the same challenges when it comes to forecasting, water management and community preparedness. Floods often have immediate and visible consequences. They can force evacuations, damage homes, disrupt local economies and place considerable strain on municipal public services. In contrast, droughts tend to develop more gradually and have significant effects on agriculture, the water supply and certain industrial activities.

The agricultural sector is particularly affected by these challenges. Farmers must make decisions based on weather and water conditions that can vary considerably from one season to the next. Better forecasting tools can help them plan, particularly in terms of water use and managing risks associated with periods of drought or heavy precipitation. During the committee study, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture submitted a brief laying out the specific needs of the agricultural sector, and I would like to thank the CFA for that.

We also have to recognize the needs of indigenous communities, including those in remote regions or flood-prone areas. Both local traditional knowledge and scientific expertise have an important role to play in helping us understand hydrological conditions and prepare for extreme events. That is why Bill C-241 provides for consultations with provincial and municipal governments, indigenous governing bodies, universities, civil society organizations and the private sector.

Another important aspect of the bill is the structured approach it proposes, complete with timelines and accountability. The strategy will have to provide for an assessment of the benefits of improved national coordination, modelling needs and opportunities to improve short- and long-term forecasting. It will also have to consider investments and novel technologies that could help develop these capabilities.

This will give us a way to collaboratively reflect on how we can improve the forecasts on which many important decisions depend. For municipalities, this information can help with infrastructure planning and emergency preparedness. For farmers, this information can support certain water management decisions. For governments, it can help them better understand the needs of communities and guide preparedness efforts. Scientific data has considerable value, but its usefulness also depends on our ability to make it available, interpret it properly and incorporate it into the decisions made on the ground. This practical aspect is particularly important to me in the context of Bill C-241.

Since the beginning of this process, I have been able to observe how water management issues involve diverse expertise and concerns. Scientists are interested in data quality and forecasting models. Municipalities are dealing with operational and budgetary realities. Provinces have important responsibilities to fulfill in managing water resources, while citizens primarily want to be able to live and work in their communities safely.

In Terrebonne and in communities across the country, people expect the different levels of government to work together when public safety is at stake. They should not have to worry about which level of government holds certain data or which network is responsible for a forecast. What matters is that the necessary information is available and can be used effectively by the relevant authorities.

It is in this spirit that I hope to see the bill move forward. We already have institutions, researchers and partners carrying out vital work. We must now examine how best to pool their knowledge and capabilities while respecting each party's responsibilities.

• (1340)

In introducing this bill, I hope to contribute to a debate that goes to the heart of the safety and future of our communities. I remain convinced that we must continue this work in order to improve Canada's ability to anticipate the risks of flooding and drought and support decisions made by stakeholders on the ground. I therefore invite my colleagues to continue their consideration of Bill C-241 in this spirit of collaboration and responsibility, so that we may move towards better co-ordination of hydrological forecasting for the benefit of Canadian communities.

Private Members' Business

[English]

Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was at the committee when the government brought forward very substantial amendments to the member's legislation. I am curious how she can rectify the difference between what the intention of the bill originally was and what the government ultimately ended up doing by gutting it.

[Translation]

Tatiana Auguste: Madam Speaker, I do not feel as though my bill has been gutted. I think these were entirely reasonable amendments that I was able to discuss with the committee members.

The goal is really to have a national strategy and to be able to help as many Canadians as possible. That is the direction we are taking with this bill.

Patrick Bonin (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to commend my hon. colleague for introducing this bill. We all know how important it is that we improve our flood and drought preparedness.

There was a question that came up in committee, and I think it is important to allow my colleague to explain it to people. Why is this bill needed in order to implement a strategy? The government often launches strategies without legislation.

Furthermore, how can we ensure that a province, especially one like Quebec, which is ahead of the curve, will be respected within its jurisdiction when the federal government implements a strategy of this kind?

• (1345)

Tatiana Auguste: Madam Speaker, the whole principle of this bill is based on a forum for collaboration with the various provinces. I would like to specify that Quebec has a great deal of expertise in this area. Some researchers from UQAM are asking to be included in a round table to get everyone on the same footing when it comes to prevention and taking action on hydrological conditions. That will help to protect not only Quebec but all communities in Canada.

Kristina Tesser Derksen (Milton East—Halton Hills South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech.

[English]

As a former municipal councillor, I understand how important it is that municipal infrastructure be supported to deal with the risks we are facing of increased flooding, and how important it is for municipalities to have financial support, but it all starts with data. I am wondering if my colleague could speak about the feedback or consultations from municipalities she spoke with.

Private Members' Business

In addition, the member has already mentioned all the folks who helped her in this journey. I am wondering if there is anyone else she would care to thank as part of her remarks.

[*Translation*]

Tatiana Auguste: Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for giving me the opportunity to thank everyone in the House, including the clerks, who helped me so much throughout this process. For a novice MP, this was quite the process. I am grateful for their help.

As for municipalities, what I keep hearing is that everyone is organizing the information differently with different data systems. As I mentioned earlier, it is really important that we all speak the same language. Once we do, we will be able to collaborate. Floods and droughts do not recognize territorial boundaries. They do not know where a province begins or where a municipality begins and ends. It is important to me that we speak the same language when it comes to data so that we can come together and work in concert to make much better data-driven forecasts.

[*English*]

Ellis Ross (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, CPC): Madam Speaker, we are here talking about Bill C-241, the national strategy on flood and drought forecasting act. We are going to hear speeches about how great this is and how needed it is. We agree on this side. This is definitely needed, given the times that we are living through. To be fair to Canadians, this is a strategy that promises to do something in the future; it is not something definitive today that we would be providing Canadians in terms of forecasting.

Before I begin the bulk of my speech, I want to talk about the forecasting that is currently done in Canada, through Environment Canada, for example. They do a pretty good job. They do an excellent job, especially when we are talking about the Canadian Coast Guard and the VHF marine system forecasting. There are many mariners on the west coast of British Columbia and across Canada who depend on its service. It really does mean life or death in some of the most treacherous areas of our waters across Canada, so we know full well what it means to be forecasting for future events.

Unfortunately though, Environment Canada discontinued its weather radio service on March 16 due to increasing costs and the need for more viable alternatives such as smart phones and weather apps. The weather radio network reached 90% of the Canadian population, but it will be replaced by other services like Alert Ready and the WeatherCAN mobile app. It will continue to provide timely weather information, but this does not talk about those people who do not have that technology, do not have Internet service or do not understand this information age we are living in.

When I think about that, I see that we would be cutting back on an essential service that people depend on. In today's day and age, we are talking about mariners, but we are also talking about farmers who have to predict the weather for their crops. It would be such a cost-saving measure, when we are already hearing speeches about the damage inflicted on Canadians from weather events, the cost to citizens of damage to houses and the cost of damage to infrastructure. As such, we are going to do a budget cut to get rid of weather radio service, but this budget cut is going to affect Canadians.

On the other hand, where is Canada sending its money in light of these budget cuts? A large portion goes to foreign aid. There is something wrong with that. Citizens are depending on services like weather radio service, forecasting models that are currently in place for even just the simple matter of going to get groceries, but the government decided to cut those services and send the money overseas to foreign governments.

One thing in particular strikes me as way beyond unusual and uncalled for: foreign aid to China. I never imagined China would need foreign aid. This is a country that is turning into an energy superpower in its own right, not with political promises, but they are doing it. They are building some of the largest dams in the world to get off the reliance on crude oil and diesel. They actually started buying up crude oil supplies, given this diesel crisis that the globe is facing, and they have the money to do it. They have the capacity to store this crude oil. At the same time, they started restricting diesel exports. They provide a lot of diesel for the rest of the world, but they have the money and the reserves to basically do that for their own country.

● (1350)

In the meantime, Canada is sending them foreign aid. It should almost be the reverse, given our deficit, given our debt and given the fact that two million Canadians are visiting food banks and 34% of them are children. One in four of the people visiting a food bank is a working person who cannot afford groceries. Why are we cutting essential services like weather forecasting when we are sending money to China to help out poor China? It is not poor.

I know we are talking about weather forecasting. I know a lot about it in terms of what is happening in B.C., for example, with the forest fires that are devastating our communities, devastating our infrastructure and burning down houses, with entire communities being evacuated. I was there during the floods in Abbotsford. What is our solution? Let us forecast the next one. Let us propose a study that will take us two years. Let us start planning a study right now so we can plan something in the future, despite the impacts that are happening right now.

To the citizens watching this right now on CPAC, all those millions of people, I am sorry, but this is not an announcement that something is going to happen today or tomorrow. It is going to take two years for the government to develop a strategy and then present it and debate it. Then maybe the government will come up with something to help with forest fires.

Private Members' Business

The conversation outside this House at least, in earnest, is that we should be doing more to adapt. It is a great conversation, but that is all it is. It is just coffee talk. We are not talking about managing our forests in B.C. to lessen the risk of forest fires. The federal government has a role to play in that. I know government members will get up to say that it is in provincial jurisdiction, but the federal government does have jurisdiction over Crown lands in the provinces across Canada. It has jurisdiction over certain properties. Also, through the Indian Act, it has jurisdiction on reserve lands.

This is okay. It is all right. I sat on the committee as well. However, the focus, I think, should be to develop a more robust plan for forecasting for Canadians, especially farmers and mariners, but also to start talking about adaptation and start helping the people who are being afflicted by these disasters. For the most part, a lot of what we are talking about here is already being done at a very foundational level, whether we are talking about insurance companies, Environment Canada or the Coast Guard.

Collaboration among provinces, governments, municipalities and first nations should not have to be legislated. People should just pick up a phone. We know what the problem is. We have local knowledge. We have municipal knowledge. We have provincial knowledge. Everybody is facing the same issue. We do not have to spend two years studying this, only to then try to draft up a strategy. Everybody wants a solution, but it has to be a wholesome solution. We cannot just pick something that is not going to help Canadians with what they are facing today and what they are going to face tomorrow.

As to budgeting, we have to take a serious look at that. We have to start limiting foreign aid and keeping a lot of that money so we can help Canadians in every situation, whether we are talking about affordability, flooding or forest fires.

• (1355)

[Translation]

Patrick Bonin (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, ever since this bill was tabled, we have consistently stated that we want to be persuaded that legislation is truly necessary to advance this strategy. We have also been consistent in raising our grave concerns about the growing number of extreme weather events, whether floods or droughts. The government must treat the climate crisis with the seriousness it deserves. It is serious enough to warrant making concrete and genuine efforts in the right areas.

Tabling a bill that simply requires the government to eventually develop a strategy on floods and droughts further delays the real action that is needed today. Throughout the time spent studying and debating this bill, the government could already have developed and implemented the strategy in question. It could have taken concrete action. Instead, here we are today still debating a bill whose necessity, unfortunately, has not yet been demonstrated.

I asked earlier whether the government could clearly explain what it is unable to do without this legislation. Why does it need this legislation? What is it about this legislation that will enable it to do more in the fight against climate change? I have not yet received an answer, which leads us to believe that this bill is not essential.

Yes, we completely agree with the principle of building resilience to the impacts of climate change with better tools to improve preparedness for extreme weather events and forecasting and response capabilities. Yes, we need to be aware that there are some Canadian provinces that could see this strategy as a step in the right direction. In that respect, we agree that the provinces need support, but do they need legislation, or do they simply want a strategy and the means to act? I believe they want strategies, concrete tools and funding. When we look at Quebec, we see that it is already pretty far along when it comes to preparing for extreme weather events. We may not have a perfect plan, but we are leading the way in Canada, so why does Quebec need this strategy? I still do not understand that.

Who is best positioned to create its own maps, for example? Quebec is already doing that, so why does it need the federal government to create maps that it already has? Why does it need the federal government to be able to talk to Ontario and come to an agreement regarding preparedness? We are already doing that. As a nation, Quebec is capable of talking to its neighbours. It must talk to its neighbours and it must be as well coordinated as possible. Does Quebec need the federal government to act as a go-between? I do not see why it would. I do not understand the government's logic here.

Perhaps there are smaller provinces with fewer resources that need more support. This could help them. We agree with that, and we are entirely open to the idea. It is also important to understand that when Ottawa talks about a so-called national strategy, for a nation like Quebec, it is a bit like nails on a chalkboard for us, especially since Quebec has been recognized as a nation in this Parliament. Now the government has come up with a national strategy that is, in fact, a federal strategy, a strategy for the federation. This strategy could open the door to further interference from a government that has, all too often, shown a tendency to interfere in provincial jurisdictions. Quebec is fully capable of managing these matters itself, coordinating and working with its neighbours.

When it comes to flooding, urgent action is needed. When it comes to droughts, urgent action is needed. When it comes to forest fires, urgent action is needed. Urgent action is needed to address all extreme weather events. What is needed is a federal government that takes the climate crisis seriously, that has much more robust and credible climate adaptation plans, and that provides adequate funding to the various levels of government on the front lines, such as municipalities and provinces, which have enormous adaptation needs.

• (1400)

For Quebec municipalities alone, annual infrastructure adaptation needs are estimated at \$2 billion. That is only for Quebec.

Private Members' Business

No matter how good of a strategy we end up with, the federal government still has to settle the fiscal deficit issue to help municipalities face growing costs in areas like infrastructure, the homelessness crisis, housing affordability, and so on. That is what the federal government should be doing. It has to send the money back where it came from and give it to the people best placed to protect the public from the increasing frequency of external climate events.

Obviously, there is some hypocrisy in that. Unfortunately, the reality is that the government is tabling a bill that will eventually lead to an unknown strategy of unknown content while claiming to be the great protector of regular people against the impact of climate change, yet this same government is responsible for unprecedented setbacks in the fight against climate change.

Yesterday, we learned from the Canadian Climate Institute that Canada's greenhouse gas emissions increased in 2025. The Canadian Climate Institute says that Canada is 20 years behind schedule on its 2030 greenhouse gas reduction target. That means that, the way things are going, Canada will not even meet its 2030 target by 2050.

Of course, the oil and gas sector is the main sector responsible for greenhouse gas emissions. This government is ready to put \$43 billion of taxpayer money into a mega pipeline that will transport a million barrels of oil from the oil sands every day. Meanwhile, there is no money for adaptation. There is nothing for emissions reduction. Now, the government would have us believe that, with this strategy, it is taking the climate crisis seriously. What a joke. I think that people are starting to understand this when they see the former minister and member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie resign because he says that he no longer sees a place for himself in this government and that the government has given up on the fight against climate change. That is part of adaptation. For us, it is out of the question to support actions that are intended to make this government look good and appear serious about addressing the climate crisis.

We are talking about extreme flooding and droughts. I would remind members that this summer, thousands of people in Canada were evacuated because of wildfires. That is the reality. We need credible plans in place, and we need Canada to step up its efforts not only on adaptation but also on reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Instead of dismantling all the measures that had been put in place, Canada should present a credible plan.

The scientific reality is that once global warming reaches a certain threshold, we will not even be able to adapt anymore. We cannot just talk about adapting to climate change. We have to do both. Unfortunately, the government is currently engaging in climate optics by proposing a bill for a strategy even though it does not need a bill to do this and it is setting us back in many respects. It is essentially like starting a fire and inviting an arsonist to put it out.

Obviously, we are going to take the high road, because when it comes to climate change, we are willing to put partisan politics aside. We are willing to ensure that we are there for the good of the people. That is the only concern guiding our actions. We are not playing politics with this issue. However, if the government wants to get serious, we will fulfill our role as elected members by improving and supporting it.

For now, all that we see is the government's ongoing climate denial, dismantlement of greenhouse gas reduction measures, abandonment of its international targets and neglect of the climate change issue and climate change adaptation. We cannot condone that.

• (1405)

We hope to be here to work on implementing real measures and that the government will someday take the lead in the fight against climate change, because that is no longer the case.

[English]

Jaime Battiste (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of the private member's bill from the member for Terrebonne, Bill C-241, an act to establish a national strategy respecting flood and drought forecasting. This bill is not just important to the country; it is really important to my riding of Cape Breton—Canso—Antigonish.

During the Labour Day weekend in September this year, for the second time in less than two weeks, my riding was hit by heavy rain and major flooding that resulted in damage to homes, roads, bridges, small businesses, and major infrastructure that connects various parts of Cape Breton, which is still being rebuilt today.

For days I toured around the riding, listening to constituents who have gotten far too used to the impacts of climate change and weather-related events, witnessing the damage that came from the heavy flooding from more than 140 millimetres of rain in some areas to more than 200 millimetres in other areas, and seeing the damage to homes and small businesses. The forecasted amount of the damages is over \$20 million right now. It has been catastrophic for Cape Breton, which had three separate state of emergencies called in less than 24 hours. The most tragic part of this was to hear that in Richmond county, the flood took the life of a Cape Breton woman. My thoughts and prayers are with her family.

Major weather events are happening frequently in my riding of Cape Breton—Canso—Antigonish. In Nova Scotia, during my time as a member of Parliament over the last seven years, three times we have had to access the disaster financing arrangement because of weather-related emergencies due to hurricanes, heavy rainfalls and heavy snowfalls that we have not seen in generations or decades. No member of the House wants to have expertise in accessing and talking about disaster financing arrangements, but unfortunately, during my time as a member of Parliament, I have gotten so used to accessing the disaster fund that I have come to know it well.

Private Members' Business

It is good that we have a disaster financing arrangement when these major weather-related events happen, that we are there for the provinces, municipalities and first nations communities. Up to 90% of the funding is covered by the federal government as part of major weather-related disasters. These programs are designed by provincial governments, they put the bill in and we pay it. Sometimes I wonder if we are just rebuilding without thoughts to the future about what we need to do to mitigate further disasters.

I want to be clear that the science and data have told us for more than a decade that climate change will impact northern and coastal communities first. In fact, when I was first elected, I went to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which highlighted what climate change would mean to the north, to coastal communities and to indigenous communities, which are often in flood zones. The unfortunate part is that the situation is not an anomaly but is becoming a pattern. From the science and research we have heard with respect to these rainstorms, hurricanes and other weather-related events, over the next 50 years, the rain will not decrease but will increase to amounts of up to 20% to 30% greater than they currently are.

This is why we need a national strategy to improve flood forecasting in Canada as proposed by the bill. It is why I support the bill. It is why, more than ever, we need to work not only to rebuild, but also to have the research and capacity to prevent future floods. We need to build back not just better but also more resilient, and we must flag the areas where we know drainage needs to be improved.

• (1410)

It is concerning to see that infrastructure that was just fixed two or three years ago after the previous disaster is once again washing away due to severe rain and flooding. We have to figure out how to mitigate and adapt to the future of climate change. We need the research, the technology and the capacity. We need to use all the resources at our disposal to make sure we have a strategy moving forward and that we are able to build to ensure that the work we are doing addresses climate change and adapts to climate change.

Canada has significant research capacity in hydrological monitoring. This bill would examine the opportunities to build on this existing capacity and the expertise of our academics. Let us ensure that, with this private member's bill, through this important flood strategy, we make the necessary investments and do the necessary work so that no MP in the House has to stand up to talk about a constituent they lost in their riding due to weather-related events that could have been prevented.

I would like to thank the member for Terrebonne for her private member's bill and her commitment to the environment. It is, indeed, important that we continue to do the work. Not only is she a strong advocate for the environment but for the work that we need to do to address climate change, and I thank her immensely for that. This bill captures the spirit of collaboration and co-operation by ensuring that we would use provincial, territorial and indigenous knowledge to inform a national strategy that can help prevent floods and droughts and allow us to better plan for emergencies. This strategy would be a way to have the entire country speak the same language and share expertise in order to close the gaps so that all communities across the country are safer.

In closing, I want to talk a bit about someone who helps my understanding and our responsibility toward the environment, and that is Dr. Albert Marshall, an elder from Eskasoni in my community. He is renowned throughout Canada not only for his work in indigenous knowledge and his commitment to the environment, but also for his belief that we must use indigenous knowledge and western knowledge in a two-eyed seeing approach to help us ensure that we are consciously aware of the things that we are doing moving forward that impact our environment.

I want to highlight that this bill follows the same approach and explicitly provides for consultation with indigenous governing bodies to ensure the strategy is designed with both indigenous and western knowledge in mind. Elder Albert Marshall always taught me that we are interdependent and interconnected to all elements of the environment. In Mi'kmaq terminology we call it "netukulimk", and it teaches us that we have responsibilities not only to each other and our communities but also to our environment. It is important for us, when we are looking at this strategy moving forward, that we develop this with balance in mind, living in balance with our environment. This private member's bill encourages us to do so, and I am glad to support it.

A national strategy would ensure that we are prepared for the impacts of the heavy rain, floods and weather-related events that are to come, but this important piece of legislation would help us ensure that we are mitigating the damage to come and make our country a safer place for all Canadians.

• (1415)

Branden Leslie (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is great to see you in the chair.

I hope members will indulge me by allowing me to acknowledge that today is a very special day for my family. Today is my daughter Morgan's first birthday. After a few challenges after her birth, the lead-up to her birthday and the celebration this weekend offer us as a family much time to reflect upon and appreciate just how tough my little girl is and how blessed we are to have her in our lives. I wish Morgan, on behalf of Mama, Maeve and Dada, a happy first birthday. We love her so much, and I cannot wait to get home to celebrate with her.

Private Members' Business

Of course, I want to take a moment to wish everybody a happy Thanksgiving as well. We live in a wonderful country, and even with the challenges we are facing as a nation, we have a heck of a lot to be thankful for. However, for many families, times are tough. With the ever-rising cost of groceries, housing and life's other necessities, putting on a big Thanksgiving dinner is not without tough choices for many and is impossible for others. As we count our blessings, let us remember those people who are struggling, and lend a hand wherever we can.

I also want to offer a special thanks to our first responders, our health care workers, our military personnel and everyone else who will be away from their family this weekend, serving and caring for others. Let us reflect on everything we have to be thankful for, be inspired to help others and ensure that we remind all those we love just how grateful we are to have them in our own life.

In terms of the legislation before us today, there is something almost uniquely Liberal about the situation. The Liberals spent years telling Canadians that the issue was urgent, and just when they finally got around to doing something about it and had a chance to pass legislation, they watered it down. That is roughly the story of Bill C-241.

I will begin by saying that flood and drought forecasting is very important, particularly in my neck of the woods. If there is a better way to share data and improve forecasting, we should pursue it. That is why Conservatives will support the bill, but supporting the objective does not mean pretending the process that got us here made any sense.

The legislation was here before, in the last Parliament, in fact, as Bill C-317. It received unanimous support in the House but then died when Parliament was prorogued. It came back in the current Parliament as Bill C-241.

The sponsor came before the environment committee and told us that the bill was essential. She spoke about flooded homes, damaged infrastructure and the need for a national strategy. That is fair enough, but that immediately raised an obvious question to me: If the issue was so urgent, why had the government not acted already? I asked the sponsor that question directly. The previous bill had passed roughly 18 months earlier. The Minister of Environment did not need to wait for another private member's bill to begin developing the strategy that is talked about in this legislation.

The answer was that the sponsor could not speak to why the minister had not done it. The answer became even more interesting when departmental officials appeared. One of the officials told us that the government does not actually need any legislation to create this strategy. She said, "We don't need a bill to create a strategy." Think about that. The government already has the authority to do this. This issue is supposedly urgent. The minister could have gotten to work, but the government just decided to wait.

Then the bill came back, and Liberal MPs decided it was still somewhat too ambitious of a bill. That is where it all gets very strange. The original bill required the strategy to assess modelling that would identify properties and infrastructure at risk from flooding, which is pretty specific. If somebody tells me they are developing flood modelling, it seems reasonable to ask where the water

might go. The Liberals amended that language and replaced it with something much broader about modelling that would simply "support flood and drought forecasting".

I asked why they had done that. If the Liberals wanted broader language, why not add broader language? Why would they delete the specific requirement to identify homes, roads, infrastructure and properties at risk? Officials said that the broader language could capture more activities, which is fine, but the government seems to think that the less a law requires, the better designed it is. Sometimes specificity is useful. If my house is about to flood, I am less interested in learning that the government has developed a broad suite of flexible modelling capabilities than I am in knowing whether or not the water is about to reach my basement.

Then we came to the most significant change with the amendment from the government. The original bill required the preparation of a proposal for a national flood and drought forecasting service built around federal and provincial co-operation. It would not be the creation of the service. It would not have billions of dollars tied to it. It would not be another department. It was merely a proposal. The Liberals decided that might be going a little too far, though, and their amendment inserted language about measures the Government of Canada "may take".

● (1420)

In legislation, as we all should know in this place, words such as "shall", "must" and "may" are always there for a reason, and they mean different things. If Parliament intends something to happen, it generally does not write, "Government may possibly consider getting around to it if everyone still feels like it later, maybe." The parliamentary secretary said he did not want to be too prescriptive. He wanted latitude. "Latitude" is a wonderful word in government. It usually means there will be plenty of room to avoid doing whatever Parliament thought it was asking for.

I asked officials directly whether the new wording meant the minister was permitted to take these measures but was not actually required to. The answer was clear: The government would no longer be required to act once the government's amendments were passed. The strategy would have to include possible measures, but it would not direct the minister or the government to do anything whatsoever after the government passed its amendments. Apparently, even a plan to make a plan was a bit too much commitment for the Liberals.

Private Members' Business

I asked what the point of a national strategy is if national strategies do not actually direct government action. The answer was that the strategy would, to use the famous new buzzword, “catalyze” people and bring them together. Now, I am sure these meetings would be excellent. There might even be sandwiches at them. However, Canadians living in flood zones are looking for something slightly more useful. That is where an important difference became clear. Measuring water levels is not the same thing as predicting a flood. The national hydrometric program measures water levels and water flows. That is useful, but officials confirmed that it does not itself issue flood warnings. Provinces and territories take that data and turn it into warnings and alerts.

I asked the obvious question. Collecting the measurement is not the same thing as producing the forecast. If a river gauge says that the water is rising, somebody still has to go and tell the mayor whether the road is expected to be underwater tomorrow. That difference is precisely why the original proposal for a co-operative forecasting service had some value and why Conservatives voted for it at second reading, yet that was the part the government decided to make optional.

We have also heard a great deal about coordination. The Canada Water Agency exists in a federal government where more than 20 different departments and agencies already have some sort of freshwater responsibility. I asked what special authority or capability the new agency had that all these others did not. The answer came back largely to coordination, committees, agreements and funding programs. I asked why, if fragmentation was the problem, the solution was to create department 21. I asked what Canadians would notice if we did not have a Canada Water Agency tomorrow. There was nobody at the table that could give me a straight answer on that one.

That is the broader lesson here. The government is very good at announcing coordination and plans. The Liberals' favourite solution to a coordination problem is to create another layer of coordination to coordinate the coordinators. Eventually, somebody asks what actually changes with all this coordination. Better data matters, but data alone does not solve the problem. Writing a strategy is the easy part. Making sure it leads to better decisions is what counts; it is all that counts.

That brings us back to the bill before us. There are still worthwhile things in it, despite the government's amendments. Let us not pretend that the Liberals on the environment committee made this legislation better in any way. They did not. They made some of the clearest language less specific. They took one of the few tangible outcomes and made it conditional on the minister deciding that maybe they want to do it.

What are we left with? The Liberals say floods and droughts are increasingly serious, and they are. When they had the bill in front of them, they apparently decided the biggest problem was that it asked the government to actually do something about it. However, when a community is flooding, Canadians do not need another strategy; they need action. It is time for action.

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette—Manawan, BQ): Madam Speaker, I too would like to wish you, my colleagues and all House employees a happy Thanksgiving and a fruitful constituency week. Naturally, I am also including the interpreters, pages, security staff and all the employees who make it possible for us to do our jobs.

As members know, Bill C-241 would create new federal administrative structures to carry out meteorological duties that are currently the responsibility of the Meteorological Service of Canada, the branch of Environment and Climate Change Canada that provides weather forecasts, warnings and data.

The bill focuses on the goal of improving forecasting for droughts and floods, which are becoming more common as a result of climate change. More specifically, the purpose of the strategy proposed in the bill is to assess the need for future investment in hydrological and water resources analysis, assessment and forecasting, particularly by using supercomputers with inputs from multiple meteorological forecast models and observations. To that end, the bill seeks to create a co-operative national hydrological and water resources forecasting service and system.

This proposal raises a number of questions that deserved to be studied and did get studied in committee. For one thing, we need to know why these services cannot be provided by the Department of the Environment's existing meteorological service. In other words, how would it be useful or necessary to create a new government agency operating in parallel to the Meteorological Service of Canada?

If the solution for improving meteorological forecasting for droughts and floods is to free up financial resources to bring in new advanced technologies, it seems like the government could remedy the situation when it tables its budget, which it is expected to do in the first or second week of November, before the parliamentary recess.

However, as we know, the current Bill C-241 has no budgetary impact. It merely suggests that the government assess the need or relevance of making a hypothetical investment. If the problem is not a lack of resources, what legal or administrative obstacles are currently stopping the government from improving the meteorological services provided by the Meteorological Service of Canada?

The preamble of Bill C-241 states that most technologically advanced countries have a national flood forecasting service. Since Quebec is an advanced country, the Government of Quebec already provides the public with weather, hydrological and hydraulic forecasts. For example, it has an app called *Vigilance* that provides 48-hour flood forecasts for many rivers in southern Quebec.

Private Members' Business

● (1430)

[Translation]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): I thank the hon. member. I want to take this opportunity to wish everyone a very happy Thanksgiving.

[English]

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.

It being 2:30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday, October 19, at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Orders 28(2) and 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

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