HOUSE OF COMMONS
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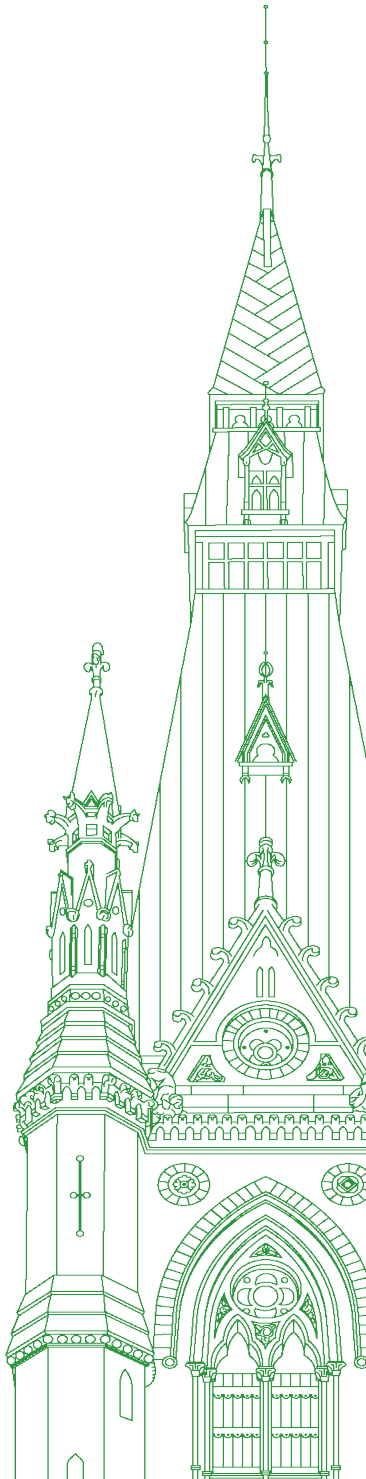
House of Commons Debates

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Wednesday, October 28, 2026



Speaker: The Honourable Francis Scarpaleggia

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, October 28, 2026

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayer

● (1400)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem, led by the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Des Collines.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

BRITISH COLUMBIA ELECTION

Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, British Columbians voted for change. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome and congratulate Mr. Doerkson's government in waiting.

I would also like to welcome back Mike Farnworth, my own MLA in Port Coquitlam. It has been a pleasure to work with Mike these past 11 years.

I welcome Ryan Peterson, the new MLA for Coquitlam-Burke Mountain. Ryan and I have known each other for as long as I have been in office.

Another welcome goes to Matt Liang, the new MLA for Coquitlam-Maillardville, who I look forward to getting to know as well.

Lastly, let me thank outgoing MLAs Jodie Wickens and Jennifer Blatherwick, who have served with great conviction and great integrity these past years. Their contributions to our community will be noted for years to come.

All in all, let us all work together to build Canada strong.

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[*Translation*]

LUC BRODEUR-JOURDAIN

Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week a great Quebecker was inducted into the Quebec sports hall of fame. I am talking about Luc Brodeur-Jourdain, three-time Vanier Cup champion with Laval University's Rouge et Or and three-time Grey Cup champion with the Montreal Alouettes, twice as a player and once as their coach.

Six championships is quite the career. However, behind these achievements is a man with a big heart, a respected leader and a team player who believes in hard work, perseverance and commitment. Luc is the kind of guy who comes home after a Grey Cup victory and then spends the next morning giving the staff a hand and washing dishes at Pause Café, the café his wife Marie-Élaine owns in Saint-Hyacinthe. “As long as it helps,” he likes to say.

Luc is just an ordinary guy who is actually extraordinary. He is a man of the people, a true Maskoutain who is proud of his roots and stands up for his community.

No matter what challenge Luc takes on, he can be sure that the entire Conservative caucus will stand with him in his next victory. I congratulate him once again on his induction. He is now part of Quebec's sports history.

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[*English*]

HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN

Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in solidarity with the courageous people and political prisoners of Iran and all those peacefully calling for freedom, dignity and human rights.

According to Amnesty International, 20 prisoners are at imminent risk of execution. The growing international support for the “no to execution Tuesdays” campaign, including the participation of United Nations special rapporteurs, sends a powerful message that the world is paying attention and that even prisoners' voices will not be silenced.

I commend those participating in this hunger strike and all those who continue raising awareness of the widespread human rights violations and executions carried out by the Iranian regime.

The persecuted men, women and children of Iran are not alone. Canada will continue to advocate for human rights, democracy and the protection of Iranians. Together, we must work toward a future of peace, freedom, justice and hope for all Iranians.

● (1405)

OXI DAY

Costas Menegakis (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize *Oxi* Day, October 28, a defining moment in modern history and a day of immense pride for the Hellenic Canadian community and for all Hellenes worldwide.

On this day in 1940, when faced with an ultimatum from fascist forces to surrender their sovereignty, the people of Greece responded with the resounding word *oxi*, or "no". That courage changed the course of World War II and stood as a beacon of resistance, proving that freedom and democracy are worth fighting for and prompting the great Winston Churchill to say that it is not that Greeks fight like heroes; it is that heroes fight like Greeks.

Today, the Greek community across Canada shares the same spirit of strength, honour and *philotimo*, a commitment that has helped build this country.

To all Canadians and to all Greeks across this great country and around the world, I say this:

[*Member spoke in Greek and provided the following translation:*]

Long live freedom. Long live Greece. Long live Canada.

[*English*]

* * *

COMMUNITY LEADER IN MISSISSAUGA EAST—COOKSVILLE

Peter Fonseca (Mississauga East—Cooksville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize one of my constituents, Alessia Commisso, an extraordinary young Canadian whose courage, determination and generosity are an inspiration to all of us.

Living with Leigh syndrome, a rare and progressive disease that has affected her mobility and sight, Alessia refuses to let challenges define her future. As a volunteer at Toronto's FIFA World Cup activities, she helped fans navigate the stadium and experience the excitement of the world's game. Her dedication earned her the recognition of being one of Toronto's FIFA World Cup 2026 Unsung Heroes.

Alessia is pursuing studies in event management at Humber Polytechnic and dreams of helping organize major events herself. She reminds us that true greatness is not measured by the obstacles we face, but by the difference we make in the lives of others.

I am proud to recognize Alessia Commisso and her remarkable contribution to our community and to Canada.

* * *

DRUG USE PROGRAM IN EDMONTON

Kerry Diotte (Edmonton Griesbach, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this scene plays out nationwide: desperate, addicted people using drugs openly in public. It is not fair to our communities, and it is not fair to people struggling with addictions, yet for too long, it has been tolerated, until now. The Edmonton Police Service has pioneered a bold new program. It does not allow open drug use. Instead, police take people who are high on drugs off the street. They bring them to a stabilization centre. There, they get clean clothes, medical care and a chance at recovery.

Our communities should not have to put up with open drug use, but we should not turn our backs on people struggling with addictions either. I believe this program could soon spread nationwide.

I congratulate Chief Warren Driechel and the Edmonton Police Service for making safer streets and for saving lives, with real recovery.

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[*Translation*]

OXI DAY

Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, Greeks around the world proudly commemorate the famous "No" or "Oxi", a historic moment that symbolizes the courage, determination and spirit of resistance of the Greek people.

On October 28, 1940, Mussolini gave the Greek prime minister Ioannis Metaxas an ultimatum, demanding that Greece allow the Axis forces to enter its territory and occupy strategic positions under the threat of war. Faced with this threat, the Prime Minister responded decisively, "Then it is war."

[*English*]

As Franklin Roosevelt alluded to, at a time when much of the world had lost hope, the Greek people dared to challenge the perceived invincibility of the Axis forces. The Greeks fought with extraordinary heroism, holding the Germans back for six weeks, significantly influencing the outcome of World War II. Their courage has inspired nations and serves as a powerful reminder that even in the darkest moments of history, the human spirit's determination to defend freedom can prevail.

[*Member spoke in Greek*]

[*English*]

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● (1410)

EMPLOYMENT

Harb Gill (Windsor West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in Canada today, thousands of people are struggling to find a job. In just two months, 110,000 Canadians have lost their jobs, with 68,000 people losing their jobs in September alone. That is 110,000 families wondering how they are going to keep a roof over their head and food on their table.

A year and a half ago, the Liberal Prime Minister told us he would get us a bigger, better deal; all we had to do was put our elbows up. We cannot feed a family with empty promises or pay a mortgage with illusions. In Windsor last month, more than 1,000 people lined up at 3 a.m. just for a chance to work at the local Costco. The promise of Canada was not that government would make life easy for us. It was that hard work would give us a fair shot at getting ahead.

Conservatives are here to cut red tape and get projects moving. We know that Canadians have the determination and the ability to build a better future. What they need right now is for the inept Liberal government to get out of the way.

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[*Translation*]

SOCIÉTÉ DE RECHERCHES HISTORIQUES DE POINTE DES CASCADES

Claude DeBellefeuille (Vallée-du-Haut-Saint-Laurent, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the 50th anniversary of the Société de recherches historiques de Pointe-des-Cascades. This historical society has developed vibrant historical sites, like the Centre d'interprétation et d'accueil du canal de Soulanges and the Parc des Ancres in Pointe-des-Cascades, a unique open-air museum.

During an event to mark this occasion, I was impressed to learn about the involvement of Jean-Pierre Poirier. From the very beginning, he has embodied the passion, rigour and perseverance that have allowed the Société de recherches historiques de Pointe-des-Cascades to become a key component in the efforts to preserve regional heritage. He has devoted more than 50 years to documenting, protecting and passing on local history. Thanks to him and the loyal volunteers and partners, our precious maritime heritage is being protected.

The organization's 50th anniversary also coincides with Mr. Poirier's own celebrations. I want to thank him for his outstanding dedication, his passion and his public service. Thanks to him, our history lives on and is being passed on with pride.

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[*English*]

MARYAM MURITALA

Amandeep Sodhi (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I rise with great sadness to commemorate the sudden loss of a beloved community member, Maryam Muritala. Maryam's smile brightened every room she walked into. She was a vibrant part of our community in Brampton. She was an advocate, a leader and an entrepreneur whose hard work and dedication inspired those around her.

With her passion for leadership and business development, she founded Canada Vendors and Canada Business Forum, creating a place for making connections, creating business opportunities and supporting Black and Nigerian businesses across our country. Beyond her remarkable professional accomplishments, Maryam was a dear friend to me and to so many others. She was someone we could turn to for a conversation, a good laugh or a much-needed hug. Her passing leaves a tremendous void in our community, but her legacy will live on in the many lives she touched.

Maryam will be deeply missed. May she rest in peace.

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FINANCE

Shuvaloy Majumdar (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister chose to borrow record amounts every year. Today, Canadians got the bill. The Bank of Canada has raised rates. A typical variable mortgage now costs $80 more a month, a line of credit costs $10 more and a car loan costs $5 more. That is more than $1,100 a year, on top of the $6,000 each family already pays toward interest on Liberal debt.

Growth is flatlining. Canada is growing at under 1%, Europe at 2% and the United States at 4%. Billions of dollars in industrial subsidies feed demand and inflation. Canada needs supply-side reform, competitive taxes, lighter regulation and a plan for transformational growth. Instead, the Prime Minister trafficks in promises of someday, maybe and never. What we are seeing is just the beginning.

How did the former central banker get it that wrong?

* * *

SMALL CRAFT HARBOURS

Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to have been raised in a small fishing community on P.E.I. The fishing harbour is the centre of the community. Last week, I was in another fishing community, Miminegash, to announce a major reconstruction of the fishing harbour, the largest project ever announced for this coastal community.

For too many years, small craft harbours, the economic engines of coastal communities, have been underfunded by governments. I will express some disappointment that most members of the Conservative opposition, including those representing fishing communities, voted against the nearly $1-billion budget allocation in April, the largest budget ever for small craft harbours.

I want to express my thanks to the Prime Minister and my Atlantic caucus colleagues, who lobbied for and supported this major budget allocation. The Prime Minister recognized the economic value of the fishing sector, and his support was invaluable.

● (1415)

THE ECONOMY

Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today's interest rate hikes by the Bank of Canada are another blow to Canadians already struggling to survive. For seniors on a fixed income, this increase means choosing among mortgage payments, keeping a car on the road and putting food on the table. Maria, a senior from Vaughan, was forced from her home because she could no longer afford it. She now rents a basement from another senior who relies on that income to pay for her own mortgage, yet she also is struggling to survive. This is the reality of the affordability crisis under the Liberal government, which they voted against.

Liberals are making unkept promises while seniors are making the sacrifices. Conservatives are fighting for lower taxes, affordable homes and a Canada where seniors can retire with dignity and respect.

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[*Translation*]

TOURISM

Hon. Mona Fortier (Ottawa—Vanier—Gloucester, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tourism is Canada's second-largest service export sector, generating nearly $35 billion in spending by international visitors.

[*English*]

Today, tourism industry leaders are gathered in Ottawa for NorthStar, a national forum hosted by Destination Canada. In 2025, Canada welcomed 19.8 million international visitors, which highlights the importance of our tourism industry. We also have the privilege of welcoming 36 leaders in the House of Commons, and we welcome them to the national capital region.

[*Translation*]

Together, they form a true Team Canada for tourism, attracting visitors, creating jobs and helping diversify our economy.

[*English*]

Tourism is a core engine and key driver of Canada's economic growth and global competitiveness.

[*Translation*]

I thank these leaders who promote Canada around the world.

* * *

[*English*]

OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

David McKenzie (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada can be an energy superpower. Today the House has an opportunity to take concrete action toward that goal, not just give a speech, hold a press conference or make an announcement. Today the House will vote on repealing the west coast tanker ban, and I urge all members to do exactly that. The only effect of the tanker ban is to shut in Canadian oil production. It is time to recognize the value of our Canadian oil and gas industry, celebrate our world-leading responsible production, celebrate the men and women who produce energy for the world in all forms, and stop holding Canada back.

Some people say that the tanker ban protects the environment, but it does not prevent loaded oil tankers from sailing in the waters the ban covers. It is just ineffective legislation. The time has come to get it and the Liberal government out of the way of Canadian prosperity.

* * *

STUDENT LEADERS

Dominique O'Rourke (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, teens today are awesome. Today I welcome 60 students from the Upper Grand District School Board who participate in the Beyond Borders leadership development program, an innovative grade 12 experiential learning semester that exemplifies how learning extends beyond books and classroom walls.

Through partnerships with businesses, universities, charities and community organizations, students tackle real-world challenges, explore future pathways and, most importantly, discover their own potential. Beyond Borders not only prepares students for what comes next but also teaches them the importance of giving back. Since the program's inception in 2012, participants have raised more than $1 million for community causes. I thank teachers Mike Parsons, Matt Mulhern and Cynthia McQueen.

Beyond Borders students prove that age is not a requirement for leadership, generosity or impact. The future is not waiting for them; they are already shaping it. Guelph and Canada are better for it.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

FINANCE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Prime Minister spent, and now Canadians will have to pay. The Prime Minister has increased spending far beyond Justin Trudeau's irresponsible levels. In fact, he has doubled the deficit left by Mr. Trudeau, and we know that deficits fuel inflation. Inflation forced the Bank of Canada to raise interest rates on Canadians.

How much will Canadians have to pay before this Prime Minister stops spending recklessly?

● (1420)

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for those questions regarding monetary policy. The Bank of Canada's message is that the impact on Canadian inflation is coming from outside Canada, but that the growth rate here in Canada will rise to 2% next year and the year after that thanks to the major policy changes implemented by the Government of Canada.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, he has just admitted that it is this government's policies, his government's policies, that have forced the Bank of Canada to raise interest rates at the expense of ordinary Canadians. Canadians already carry the most debt anywhere in the G7. Now they will be forced to pay more to the banks, while the Prime Minister celebrates. What a disconnect from the reality faced by ordinary people.

Will he acknowledge that Canadians are going to face hardship as a result of this increase?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if there is a disconnect, it is between my words and his. The Hansard is there to sort that out. What is clear is that the Bank of Canada says that the growth rate here in Canada will rise to 2% next year and the year after that. This will be the highest growth rate in the G7.

[*English*]

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Prime Minister spent, and today Canadians are paying the price. He doubled the deficit that Trudeau left behind, increased government spending to the highest share of GDP since 1996 and is threatening to add $700 billion more in debt. More deficits cause more inflation, which today caused the Bank of Canada to bring in more interest on Canadians.

How much will Canadians have to pay before the Prime Minister finally hits the brakes on his out-of-control Liberal spending?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bank of Canada was very clear about the global causes of inflation and why it acted. It was very clear that our growth is going to pick up next year and the year following, the strongest in the G7.

Let us be clear about the fiscal record of the government: the lowest net debt in the G7, the second-lowest deficit in the G7, operational spending down from 8% to 2%, a 10% cut in the civil service and a 20% cut in consultants, $60 billion of savings. That is even before the budget next week. We are building Canada strong—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, how completely out of touch that is. Canadian families are the most indebted anywhere in the G7, and today they will go home to learn that their mortgage payments, car payments and line of credit payments will go up because the Prime Minister could not control his spending. He doubled Trudeau's deficit and has imposed a new fuel tax that is driving up the cost of diesel to 30¢ higher than in the U.S., which is one of the causes the Bank of Canada cited in raising rates on Canadians today.

Will the Prime Minister get his hands out of the pockets of Canadians so they do not have to pay more in their rates?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I repeat: Spending is down from 8% per year to 2%. This is new information. The operational budget will be closed next year, one year ahead of schedule. There is a 10% reduction in civil service, a 20% reduction in consultants, the strongest growth in the G7 in the coming years, and mortgage affordability down every month in the current government's time.

● (1425)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister says affordability is better. Everybody out there knows that is false, and it is worse today. The Bank of Canada governor said that food price inflation will be even higher next year: “Higher diesel prices raise freight and operating costs in fuel-intensive sectors such as food processing [and] agriculture”.

The Prime Minister is not to blame for world prices, but he is to blame for the fact that our prices are much higher than the world's, in part because of what the Nova Scotia Energy Board calculates is 16¢ a litre in extra fuel standard taxes that the Prime Minister is imposing at the pump.

Will the Prime Minister reverse this tax so that we can reverse the inflation and reverse the rate hikes?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a problem with starting to quote the Bank of Canada. It is all on the public record. If we look at the Bank of Canada and affordability metrics, there was 54% of disposable income affordability before this government came into place, and it is now at 41%. For 24 straight months, asking rents have gone down. We are improving affordability in a tough housing market. Next time the Leader of the Opposition goes through Edmonton, he might want to confirm that the price of diesel in Edmonton is the same as in the United States.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, could he be more out of touch? That sounded just like his statement back on March 25, that affordability is the best it has been in a decade. The same month he said that, Food Banks Canada registered a record-smashing 2.35 million visits, 9% higher than when he took office, with fewer Canadians believing they will ever be able to afford a home than in the other 21 countries polled by Habitat for Humanity.

Will the Prime Minister admit that affordability is not the best it has been in a decade?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about affordability and steps that governments can take to improve affordability. The Canadian dental care plan benefits over 17,000 people in the riding of Battle River—Crowfoot. The Canada child benefit supports over 14,000 families. There are EDC summer job grants. I could go on. They have two things in common: first, that this government proposed them and passed them; and second, that the Leader of the Opposition voted against them every single time.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this week, the Prime Minister hosted a grand banquet for the Crown Prince of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, arranged a photo op on Parliament Hill and even provided a mounted escort. Let us not forget that the United Arab Emirates is currently funding violence in Sudan, including violence perpetrated by a group that commits torture, rape and summary executions.

This week, that same Prime Minister also refused to allow the Premier of Quebec to speak at the Canada-European Union summit in Montreal.

How can the Prime Minister justify bestowing such honours on the United Arab Emirates while offering nothing to Quebec?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to welcoming President von der Leyen and President Costa of the European Union.

We offered the Premier of Quebec the opportunity to officially welcome both presidents. I invited him to join me at my table for a private conversation with them. Those are honours befitting the beginning of a process, a process with the European Union.

Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Paul Saint-Pierre Plamondon is no less the premier of Quebec than the Prime Minister is the prime minister of Canada.

Entering into agreements with the United Arab Emirates is no obstacle for the Prime Minister, and neither is going to Turkey to support Erdoğan. Visiting Erdoğan and telling him that we share common values is no problem, even though he is an enemy of human rights and targets his country's LGBTQ community and free press. However, giving the floor to the Premier of Quebec to talk about Quebec in Quebec is out of the question.

Does the Prime Minister realize the kind of message and images he is sending around the world?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we work with a range of countries to improve the situation during the most difficult wars, including wars in Ukraine, the Middle East, Gaza and Sudan. Every time, I have raised issues and solutions with these countries' leaders, and I have offered Canada's assistance.

● (1430)

Yves-François Blanchet (Beloeil—Chambly, BQ): Mr. Speaker, more importantly, he wanted to befriend them in order to make money.

Yesterday, all the parties condemned the Prime Minister's refusal to accept Quebec's request to speak at the summit in Montreal. The Prime Minister promised to co-operate with Quebec, but he is off to a very bad start.

Will he listen to reason and, quite simply and courteously, offer the Premier of Quebec the opportunity to address the European guests in Montreal, Quebec, in French?

Right Hon. Mark Carney (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would say, "in Montreal, Quebec, Canada".

I have made offers to the Premier of Quebec.

As for co-operation with Quebec, there have already been four meetings with Quebec's official delegation to discuss the terms of the new agreement for the future. This week is just the beginning of a process.

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[*English*]

TAXATION

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's 16¢-a-litre fuel standard tax is bad enough, but what is even worse is where the money goes. To quote energy expert Heather Exner-Pirot, "To meet their carbon intensity targets, many Canadian refiners blend biofuels into their petroleum products. But Canada is not self-sufficient in their production. More than half of Canada's biofuels are imported, predominantly from the United States."

The Government of Canada forces the people of Canada to pay 16¢ a litre more to buy American biofuels. Why?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bank of Canada understands and acknowledges the challenges in the global economy. However, it is Wednesday, and I have good news. In fact, Canada has the strongest fiscal position in the G7, the lowest net debt to GDP in the G7 and one of the lowest deficits to GDP in the G7. The Bank of Canada has seen that we are going to have the second-fastest growth in the G7. On top of that, we are investing to be an energy superpower. We are going to build Canada strong together.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, not only did the Prime Minister not answer the question, but the finance minister did not even seem to hear it. The question was about the 16¢-a-litre diesel and gasoline tax charged at the pump. Now, it is bad enough to tax the Canadian people. It is even worse to force them to pay that money to the United States of America to buy U.S. biofuels.

While Canadians cannot afford groceries, while they must empty their bank to fill up their tank, why is the Prime Minister forcing them to pay a 16¢-a-litre tax at the pump to Trump?

Hon. Tim Hodgson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have some good news for the member opposite. Canola prices are up 8% this year. The amended clean fuel regulations will create significant new demand for canola. Rather than fight against canola farmers, why does he not help us build Canada strong?

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker, the minister wants to build America strong, because the cost of the majority of the biofuels that the government is forcing refiners to purchase with this 16¢-a-litre tax is not going to Canadian farmers. It is going to megacorporations south of the border. On this day when the Bank of Canada governor says that food prices are rising because of higher diesel costs, the Prime Minister is imposing a tax on Canadians at the pump and on truckers who deliver us our food.

Why is he putting that money in the pockets of the Americans?

Hon. Tim Hodgson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct my last statement. Canola prices are up 8% because of clean fuel regs, but they are up 30% this year. Thirty per cent, and the Leader of the Opposition is trying to talk us down. We have been helping the farmers. We have been helping the people in Alberta. He is talking against them. We should work together and build Canada strong.

● (1435)

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at Trump Tower, they will be popping the champagne today, knowing that this government is defending a 16¢-a-litre tax that sends Canadian money south of the border to subsidize large U.S. corporations selling us overpriced biofuel. That single mother who is turning back items at the grocery store, because it costs too much for the trucker to deliver those items, or the family who cannot quite fill up the minivan can take comfort in knowing that the Prime Minister has a "make America great again" tax at the pump.

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the Leader of the Opposition likes to talk, but he should listen. He should listen to the voices in this House, like when we extended the suspension of the excise fuel tax. That is helping Canadians. That is helping families. That is helping truckers. That is helping farmers. That is helping fishers across this nation.

I hope Canadians are watching at home today because this gentleman has voted against supporting Canadians.

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[*Translation*]

FINANCE

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this Prime Minister could not be more disconnected from reality. Today he said that things are going well for Canadians.

After Canada experienced the worst food inflation in the G7, after 2.35 million visits were made to food banks, and after the Bank of Canada was forced to raise interest rates today because of his inflationary spending, this Prime Minister is now looking to add another $735 billion to our national debt over the next five years.

Will he hit the brakes before we hit a wall?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians can see the bigger picture. They understand that there are external factors that obviously affect the economy and prices in Canada.

What the people at home want to know is why, when we introduced the Canada groceries and essentials benefit that will help 12 millions Canadians and provide up to $1,891 per family, the Conservative leader voted against this measure and convinced all his colleagues to vote against it. That is the question.

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister not only doubled the deficit left by Justin Trudeau, he also increased annual government spending to the highest share of GDP since 1996, outside of COVID. He has now driven inflation above target and forced the Bank of Canada to increase interest rates. Canadians are going to be hit hard on their mortgage and car loan payments as of this evening.

Will he stand up and announce that he will stop this irresponsible spending?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what Canadians are hearing is an opposition leader who is always criticizing the Canadian economy, and I am sure they are sick of it.

Members on this side of the House are confident. Canada is attracting talent from around the world. Canada is one of the rare countries in the world that can build a ship, build a car and certify a nuclear power plant. Canada is a country that has the critical minerals needed for the 21st century. We are producing more energy. Canada is the only G7 country with a free trade agreement with every other G7 country.

Rather than criticizing, the Leader of the Opposition should be celebrating the hard work of Canadians across the country.

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INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is never too late to do the right thing. The Prime Minister decided to hold another summit with the Europeans on Quebec soil without including the provincial premiers, even though some changes might affect areas of provincial jurisdiction.

Will the Prime Minister show some respect for Quebeckers and at least let their Premier speak?

Hon. Joël Lightbound (Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and Quebec Lieutenant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, doing the right thing means strengthening our ties with the European Union, which represents 450 million consumers and 18% of the global economy. That is exactly what we are doing in the interests of Quebec and in the interests of Canada as a whole.

I want to commend the Quebec delegation for the work it did in preparation for this summit. I also want to point out that the Premier of Quebec and all the other premiers are invited to this very important event. I hope that the Premier of Quebec will be there in the best interests of Quebec.

● (1440)

Mario Simard (Jonquière—Hébertville—Pays-des-Bleuets, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Premier of Quebec is right to demand an opportunity to speak at the Canada-European Union summit.

He could even claim a seat at the negotiating table, because the federal government is negotiating with Europe on labour mobility, energy, critical minerals and more. All of these areas fall, in whole or in part, within Quebec's jurisdiction. Excluding Quebec violates the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine. It is an insult to all Quebeckers.

Will the Prime Minister grant the Premier of Quebec the opportunity to speak that is rightfully his on his own turf?

Hon. Joël Lightbound (Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and Quebec Lieutenant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when I get up in the morning, I am certain of three things: The sun will rise in the east, the leader of the Bloc Québécois and Bloc members will be outraged by anything and everything, and Bloc members will claim to speak on behalf of all Quebeckers. Those are certainties.

Quebeckers are asking for closer ties with the European Union. Obviously, they want that to be done in partnership with Quebec, as it was in the lead-up to this summit.

Closer ties with the European Union are good for Quebec and good for Canada. I sincerely hope that Quebec will be there with us.

Mario Simard (Jonquière—Hébertville—Pays-des-Bleuets, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is a fourth certainty: the federal government's lack of respect for Quebec.

Whether a certain minister likes it or not, geopolitics is not a matter of federal jurisdiction. Quebec has the right to conduct its own international relations in all areas that fall wholly or partly under its jurisdiction. That is the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine. The Prime Minister's insulting attitude and his Minister of Industry's outlandish statements undermine decades of Quebec and Canadian foreign policy.

Will the Prime Minister reconsider, respect the Quebec nation and invite the Premier of Quebec to speak at the summit?

Hon. Joël Lightbound (Minister of Government Transformation, Public Works and Procurement and Quebec Lieutenant, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the Bloc Québécois's outrage over everything. All summer long, the Bloc criticized us for doing too much for Quebec: too much for infrastructure, with $10 billion in investments; too much for the Davie shipyard in Lévis, with 5,000 jobs in Quebec; too much for Alstom in La Pocatière and Saint-Bruno-de-Montarville. The Bloc Québécois criticized us for supporting the Churchill Falls project, which will ensure prosperity for generations of Quebeckers. It is criticizing us for going ahead with the high-speed rail project, which will help build Quebec. The Bloc Québécois is busy stoking division and outrage. Our government is busy building Quebec.

* * *

[*English*]

FINANCE

Sandra Cobena (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister promised to move at speeds not seen in generations, but Canadians did not realize that what he meant was accumulating debt at speeds not seen in generations. In five years, he plans to add more debt than all prime ministers before Justin Trudeau combined. Today, because of the Liberals' inflationary spending, the Bank of Canada has raised interest rates, making government debt even more expensive.

Can the Prime Minister explain who will repay this mountain of debt and how?

Hon. Evan Solomon (Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all the opposition members do is talk down our economy and our workers, but they do not realize that criticism does not create jobs. Their negativity does not make life affordable.

Did the Conservatives vote for the groceries and essentials benefit? No. Do they vote to make life more affordable? No. In the member's own riding, when we support Technical Steel Corp or Exco Engineering, do they support that investment in businesses to create jobs? No. They should get with the program, and we should build this country strong together.

Sandra Cobena (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member did not answer my question. My question was about the vicious cycle that the Prime Minister is building, which is more debt, more interest and more borrowing. In fact, he is borrowing to pay for the interest he already owes on the debt that he already took on. Today, the Bank of Canada raised interest rates. Now, the government pays more to borrow, families pay more on their mortgages and more taxes go toward interest instead of services.

When will the Prime Minister break his vicious cycle and finally get this borrowing under control?

Hon. Evan Solomon (Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has the fastest growing economy in the G7 and the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G7. We are creating jobs.

The Conservatives talk about making life more affordable, but they do not do anything about it. Do they vote for affordable child care? No. Do they vote for national school food lunches? No. Do they vote for dental care? No. All they know how to say is no to Canadians. We will continue to say yes to building Canadian, yes to building strong and yes to making life more affordable for everybody.

● (1445)

Adam Chambers (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister assumed in his first budget that interest rates would stabilize and go lower, except they have actually been going up, including at the Bank of Canada. That means that Canadians will pay more when they renew their mortgage, but it also means taxpayers are on the hook for billions more. Why is that? It is because the Prime Minister chose to double the size of the deficits he inherited, and he has pushed borrowing to record numbers, including nearly $600 billion this year alone.

Will the Prime Minister tell Canadians how much his mistake has cost Canadians with higher interest rates?

Hon. Rechie Valdez (Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will share that we have chosen to be there for Canadians. In fact, thanks to our government, we have cut taxes for 22 million Canadians. This means more money stays in their pockets. While things are challenging at the grocery store, we have delivered the national groceries and essentials benefits so that the average family of four in our ridings receive close to $1,900. That is real support, and we are going to continue to be there.

The good news, also, is that we have increased the Canada child benefit. That is an additional $160 per child this year.

[*Translation*]

Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bank of Canada says inflation is going to remain high and exceed 3% until the end of 2027. As a result, the cost of living will continue to rise, putting even more pressure on Canadian families and farmers. Furthermore, the government intends to increase the federal fuel excise tax. The bank itself admits that this increase will drive up inflation. This is completely irresponsible.

When will the government put an end to its inflationary decisions that are driving up the cost of living?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the MP rose to speak about affordability, yet time and again she has voted against measures designed to help Canadians, to help the people in her constituency. Whether it is dental care, the Canada child benefit or the groceries and essentials benefit, she has consistently opposed any support for Canadians. She will have to explain those choices to her constituents.

Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am quoting the Bank of Canada, which is confirming the Liberal government's failure on the economy.

Our growth has plateaued at 1%, which is less than half the rate in the United States and barely one-third of the global growth rate of 3.1%. Worse still, half of this result comes from government spending alone. According to the Bank of Canada, “Finding work continues to be challenging”. This situation is untenable, especially in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis.

When will the government stop adding to the tax burden and adopt our Conservative plan to create stable, well-paying jobs?

Hon. Anna Gainey (Secretary of State (Children and Youth), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand the challenges Canadians are facing. That is why we made the national school food program permanent. That is why we lowered the fuel tax. That is why we brought in the groceries benefit. More recently, we announced the national heat pump rebate of $10,000 for low-income families.

We are there for Canadians. It would be nice to have the support of the members across the way on these issues.

* * *

[*English*]

STEEL AND ALUMINUM INDUSTRY

John-Paul Danko (Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Hamilton is proud to be Canada's steel city. It is part of who we are. This is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Let us try to be fair. Let us try again.

The hon. member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas.

John-Paul Danko: Mr. Speaker, we are talking about real jobs for real people, and this disruption is extremely disrespectful.

Hamilton is proud to be Canada's steel city, and thousands of families depend on steelmaking. It—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1450)

The Speaker: We will give it one more shot from the top. The hon. member will understand that there is only so much I can do.

The hon. member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas has the floor. Let us try again.

John-Paul Danko: Mr. Speaker, this is a critical issue for all Canadians, and it would be nice if the opposition were interested in what is happening. In the face—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Members have to co-operate. I would ask them to help me out.

I want to finish today as close to three o'clock as possible, and I do not know if that is going to be possible now, but let us try.

The hon. member for Hamilton West—Ancaster—Dundas, from the top.

John-Paul Danko: Mr. Speaker, Hamilton is proud to be Canada's steel city. Thousands of families depend on steelmaking for their livelihood.

In the face of the illegal and unjustified American tariffs, can the Ministry of Industry give the House an update on what our government is doing to protect Canada's steel industry and support steelworkers?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that the steel industry helped build this country. We have it as a pivotal industry as we are building Canada strong.

Last week, I joined the Prime Minister and the Premier of Ontario to announce an additional $5.2 billion to support the steel industry from the unjustified American tariffs. We will make sure that people in Hamilton get that support, that we create growth in the country and, more importantly, that we create jobs across the steel industry.

Michael Guglielmin (Vaughan—Woodbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, the industry minister said she would provide the demand letter she sent to Cleveland-Cliffs, because it outlines the way in which the company has breached its contractual commitments. Yesterday, I stood up in the House and asked her for a date on which she would provide us with that letter. She did not answer the question. Meanwhile, we hear from Cleveland-Cliffs repeatedly that it is not in violation of any of its contractual commitments, and workers are still awaiting some transparency.

I will ask the minister this again: Will she provide us today with the demand letter that she sent to Cleveland-Cliffs so workers can get some transparency?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question is not that. The question is whether the Conservatives are in favour of protecting the jobs at Stelco. I have not heard that from them. My question to my colleague is—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I will have to ask the minister to go back a little further and start a little closer to the beginning, because I could not hear what she was saying.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, the question is not that. The question is, are the Conservatives in favour of protecting the jobs at Stelco and Hamilton, yes or no?

Ned Kuruc (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Cleveland-Cliffs's CEO admitted that he bought Stelco because Canadian steel was hurting his American business. He admitted to blocking Stelco from selling steel to the United States, and now 350 Hamilton steelworkers are losing their jobs.

Conservatives demand that the Liberals take Stelco to court, stop illegal steel dumping and secure a tariff-free steel deal. Instead, the Liberals keep sending love letters and extending deadlines.

Stelco's CEO is protecting American profits and his American workers. What are the Liberals doing to protect ours?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be serious. There are people hurting because of these layoffs. There are people who are wondering whether they will be able to—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1455)

The Speaker: I am sure that people in Hamilton would like to hear this debate.

The hon. Minister of Industry.

Hon. Mélanie Joly: Mr. Speaker, let us be serious here. There are people right now who are asking whether they can pay their mortgage. There are people who are asking themselves whether they will be able to pay their bills. That is why we did not stop. We did not wait. The Conservatives are late. We have been at it and starting the legal process for more than 10 days now. They should, basically, read the news.

Ned Kuruc (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only thing late is the minister filing a lawsuit to protect Hamilton workers.

This is the third pay cycle that Hamilton steelworkers are missing. I spoke with Stelco workers this morning and they want action. The CEO admitted yesterday that he bought the company as a defensive measure to protect his American profits. We also know he supports Trump and his unjustified steel tariffs. The Liberals approved this takeover. Now they are watching Canadian steel jobs disappear.

Will the Prime Minister stop being bullied by Trump's buddies and file the lawsuit today?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Industry and Minister responsible for Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I met with and I have been in contact in the past two weeks with the head of United Steelworkers, Marty Warren. The union is fully supporting the position of the government. Of course, I was in the studio at CBC when Cleveland-Cliff's CEO made the admission regarding the fact that he bought Stelco to get rid of a competitor. We take that admission very seriously and will act.

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today's hike demonstrates the government's economic plan is not working. Inflation is taking hold.

According to the Globe, today's hike means that the cost of a typical variable mortgage will rise $82 a month and a typical home equity line of credit $12 a month, or over $1,100 a year.

When is the government going to introduce supply-side reforms to the economy to increase productivity and wages and to make life more affordable?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have had a display in question period today where the Conservatives are trying to catch up with my colleague with respect to steel. I note the member's question over there.

Why can the Conservatives not just once stand up and say that there is a war in the Strait of Hormuz or that there is a trade attack that is illegal and unjustified on Canada. Yes, we are facing economic headwinds, and the G7 is going to be led by Canada despite all of that. The Conservatives should stand up and celebrate Canada's success and its—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's plan simply is not working. It is focused on the demand side of the economy. It is spending more and more and driving up the cost of interest, which is the fastest-growing line item in the budget that is projected to chew up almost 14¢ of every dollar by decade's end. Now the Bank of Canada is hiking the interest rate, driving up interest costs on mortgages, lines of credit and car loans. For a typical family, this amounts to more than $1,100 a year.

Again, I ask the question, when will the government start focusing on supply-side reforms to increase productivity and increase wages to make life more affordable for Canadians?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every time we propose a measure to make life easier and more affordable and to make conditions for Canadians just a little better, whether it is reducing fuel taxes, whether it is a Canada food and essentials benefit or whether it is the Canada child benefit, these Conservatives, led by that finance critic, get up and oppose it. When we grow the economy, they decry that. When we protect jobs in Hamilton, they—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary East.

Jasraj Hallan (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like a typical Liberal elitist, the Prime Minister is sending more money to his banker, bondholder and Brookfield buddies in debt interest than what goes to provinces in health care transfers. Just this year, a family of four will pay $6,000 in debt interest. Justin Trudeau doubled the debt. The Prime Minister took that as a challenge. He doubled down and doubled his deficit.

Will the Prime Minister show up at the finance committee and tell Canadians exactly why he is so out of touch and why Canadians are so out of money?

● (1500)

Hon. Wayne Long (Secretary of State (Canada Revenue Agency and Financial Institutions), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us just think about this for Canadians. That member and that party voted against targeting the Canada child benefit to families that need it the most. They think a family that makes $500,000 should get the same as a single mother who makes $20,000 a year. They voted against a school food program; voted against feeding hungry children. They voted against a dental program that gives dental care to seniors who need it the most. That side has no credibility when it comes to affordability. On this side of the House—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Calgary East.

Jasraj Hallan (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the measure of a success in this country should be how many government programs Canadians get off, not get put on to. Debt interest is the fastest-growing expense, more than health care and more than the military. It is the money that gets sent to the Prime Minister's banker, bondholder and Brookfield buddies every single year. This guy said he would spend less, but he is all talk and no results. That is why 2.35 million Canadians visit a food bank every single month.

The Prime Minister doubled Justin Trudeau's deficit. Is he looking to double food bank lines too?

Hon. Wayne Long (Secretary of State (Canada Revenue Agency and Financial Institutions), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, we are going to continue to focus on affordability measures for Canadians. The groceries and essentials benefit will put up to $1,900 in the pockets of families. We cut the taxes, and they voted against it, of course, for 22 million Canadians. We paused the federal excise tax on gas. We will continue to focus on and deliver for Canadians. That side can continue with the empty rhetoric.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FINANCE

Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians can see that the Prime Minister is using creative accounting to manage the country's finances. He is dividing a monumental deficit across three different credit cards: one for current expenditures, another misleadingly labelled “investments”, and a third hidden within Crown corporations. Stephen Harper and Justin Trudeau never hesitated to appear before parliamentary committees.

Will the Prime Minister support the Conservative motion and come explain his creative accounting practices before the Standing Committee on Finance?

Hon. François-Philippe Champagne (Minister of Finance and National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are always prepared to answer questions before the Standing Committee on Finance.

What is strange is to see the Conservatives talk down the Canadian economy in every one of their questions, even though international institutions and the Bank of Canada recognize that there are external factors at play. The good news is that Canada has the second-fastest growth rate in the G7. One would think the Conservatives would celebrate our workers, our industries and Canada.

If they do not want to do that, we will always be here on this side of the House to stand up for our workers and our industries.

Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is clear is that we need to hear the truth. The truth is that deficits have doubled and the debt has doubled. Even the Parliamentary Budget Officer is struggling to understand the creative way in which this government and this new Prime Minister are managing the country's finances.

We are seeing staggering expenditures hidden across different credit cards. We just want him to come and explain himself before the finance committee.

Will he accept our motion today and appear before the Standing Committee on Finance, yes or no?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, occasionally, we like to rise in the House to remind the Conservatives that they have never defined what they mean by inflationary spending.

Is it the Canada child benefit?

Is it equalization?

Is it our military spending that has increased and will continue to increase to reach 5% of GDP?

What does my Conservative friend consider to be inflationary spending?

[*English*]

Danielle Martin (University—Rosedale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we live in an era when global events have local impacts. The people of University—Rosedale understand that there are forces affecting our economy that are beyond our control. They do not want to hear parliamentarians talk down our economy, our businesses and our workers. They want us to address affordability by building on our strengths and our shared values.

Can the Secretary of State for the CRA and Financial Institutions tell us about the work under way to make life more affordable for people in Toronto and across this great country?

Hon. Wayne Long (Secretary of State (Canada Revenue Agency and Financial Institutions), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for University—Rosedale for her strong advocacy on the disability tax credit and automatic federal benefits. We are going to build a strong, resilient economy for all Canadians. We are attracting outside investment. We are going to build Canada strong. We are cutting taxes for 22 million Canadians. The groceries and essentials benefit is offering $1,900 for families. We will continue to focus on and deliver on affordability measures for Canadians. On this side of the House, Canadians know who stands with them. It is our side.

* * *

● (1505)

NATURAL RESOURCES

Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has the oil the world needs, the workers to produce it and the rail lines to get it to the Pacific. Strathcona Resources is ready to ship up to 250,000 barrels per day through Prince Rupert to global markets. This would mean more jobs, a stronger Canadian economy and more customers for our oil, and the best part is that no government subsidies are necessary. In fact, this is a company that is ready to bring in its own private dollars and make it happen. The only thing standing in the way is the Liberals' tanker ban.

Will they do the right thing, advocate for the well-being of Canadians and remove it?

Hon. Tim Hodgson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me share what the new Conservative Premier of British Columbia just said: “Our government’s focus is on the project in front of us.... Pacific Link has been declared in the national interest, it takes a southern route, and it will create...jobs [for] British Columbia.” Other Conservatives seem to be able to get on board and support Pacific link. These guys just look for opportunities to fight. We are interested in building, not fighting. Why do they not join us?

Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is not an either-or decision, and at the end of the day it is a federal matter, so it is up to this government to make the choice. Will it take the tanker ban and remove it or, at the bare minimum, at least grant an exemption so that this private investment can go through, so that Canadian jobs can be created, so that oil can get to world markets and so that we as a country can be proud of what we produce here at home? The government is more than happy to give handouts to corporations that come begging. This one is not. It just needs this obstacle out of the way.

Hon. Tim Hodgson (Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, here is what this government is doing: expanding the Taylor to Gordondale pipeline; expanding the Sunrise pipeline; building Pacific link, a million-barrel-a-day pipeline to the west coast; building LNG Canada phase one; supporting Woodfibre; supporting Tilbury; and supporting Ksi Lisims.

All the Conservatives do is complain and look for things to fight about. Why do they not help build Canada with us?

Jeff Kibble (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the Liberal tanker moratorium, up to 34 tankers can be approved every month on the southern route, yet the northern route is equally safe, has less marine traffic and can have the same protections as the south. Having navigated the navy's tanker on the B.C. coast for years, I know what it takes to operate tankers safely, and the northern route can also meet the same standards as the south. This is a Liberal embargo on Canada and companies like Strathcona Resources that are standing by to ship Canadian oil overseas.

Will the Prime Minister immediately grant an exemption for the northern route, yes or no?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is so much going on on the west coast that is driving up economic growth and opportunity for that member's constituents that it is hard to name them.

In addition to what my colleague, the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, just laid out, let me just congratulate the port of Vancouver for an all-time record of shipments going out of that port that is building our country strong and diversifying our trade markets. It has us on the path to double non-U.S. exports over the next 10 years. We are building British Columbia and we are building Canada—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby Central.

* * *

LABOUR

Wade Chang (Burnaby Central, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, workers and unions in my riding have emphasized the importance of protecting workers' rights and ensuring their voices are heard at the bargaining table. Our government shares this commitment and believes meaningful collective bargaining leads to better agreements. This is why we are giving workers and employers more time to negotiate and greater support to resolve disputes.

Could the minister explain how Bill C-39 will protect workers' rights, strengthen collective bargaining and ensure government intervention is reserved for exceptional circumstances?

Hon. Anna Gainey (Secretary of State (Children and Youth), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government believes that the best agreements are reached at the bargaining table. Bill C-39 strengthens the bargaining process by providing employers and unions with more time to negotiate, earlier access to dispute resolution tools and additional support to help the parties reach agreements before disputes escalate.

At the same time, the bill preserves the fundamental right to strike while introducing important guardrails around the use of section 107, ensuring that government intervention remains exactly what it should be: rare, exceptional, transparent and a measure of last resort.

● (1510)

PARKS CANADA

William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, Parks Canada announced it is cutting the 55-year search and rescue K9 program in Banff National Park. This program is essential to park visitor safety, responding to thousands of calls. Leroy, the last rescue dog, tracked 156 individuals and found 57 people over seven years. This is a small team that has a huge impact on visitor safety. These dogs cover areas 30 to 50 times faster than human rescuers. They are essential to the safety in our parks.

Why is the minister cutting vital safety programs while her executives received millions of dollars last year?

Wade Grant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we thank the federal public service employees for their dedication and deeply value their critical role in protecting Canadians. We need to continue to protect Canadians' nature, environment and emergency preparedness. We continue to ensure Canada's national parks and heritage are preserved, safe and managed right to serve both Canadians and our environment, and we will continue to do that.

* * *

LABOUR

Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have good news. Today, the Liberals have a chance to vote for our NDP bill to repeal section 107 and protect the right to strike. Unions and workers everywhere have supported it.

The government has a clear choice, continue its unconstitutional attacks on workers in Bill C-39 or vote in favour of our NDP bill. Which is it? Will the Liberals finally respect the demands of workers or continue caving to CEOs by violating the right to strike?

Hon. Steven MacKinnon (Minister of Transport and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously, we honour the role of workers, honour the role of organized labour and recognize that, in fact, there are rights to collectively bargain, but sometimes those rights, in order to be exercised, need federal support, especially in Canada Labour Code situations. We will, under Bill C-39, put in place new, expanded measures in order to support parties that find it difficult to achieve a collective agreement. We want to make those strikes all too rare.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order regarding what happened earlier when a colleague in the House—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I cannot hear the hon. member.

The hon. member.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a point of order regarding what happened earlier when a colleague, who represents his community here in the House, was trying to ask a question to a minister. There was a lot of noise, purposely to stop him from—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I am going to finish hearing what the hon. member has to say, one way or the other.

The hon. member.

Hon. Arielle Kayabaga: Mr. Speaker, maybe this time they will listen.

Members purposely made noise to try to stop the member from speaking. I think we are getting into the territory of privilege. If a member cannot speak and ask a question in the House on behalf of the people he represents, there is a potential question of privilege.

The Speaker: It was difficult, but we did get through it. This is why I ask members sometimes to try not to be provocative, because it creates an unparliamentary ruckus. I would ask members to make it easier next time.

I thank the hon. member for her point of order.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1515)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—APPEARANCE OF THE PRIME MINISTER BEFORE THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

The House resumed from October 27 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: It being 3:14 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion of the member for Richmond—Arthabaska—des-Sources relating to the business of supply.

Call in the members.

● (1525)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 182)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif
Albas
Anderson
Arnold
Baber
Baldinelli
Barrett
Beaulieu
Berthold
Bezan
Blanchette-Joncas
Bonk
Bragdon
Brunelle-Duceppe
Caputo
Champoux
Cobena
Cooper
Dancho
Davies (Niagara South)
DeBellefeuille
DeRidder
Diotte
Dowdall
Epp
Falk (Provencher)
Garon
Genuis
Gill (Brampton West)
Gill (Windsor West)
Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)
Goodridge
Groleau
Gunn
Hardy
Hoback
Jackson
Jivani
Khanna
Kirkland
Konanz
Kramp-Neuman
Kuruc
Lake
Larouche
Lawton
Lemire
Lewis (Essex)
Lloyd
Mahal
Malette (Kapuskasing—Timmins—Mushkegowuk)
Mazier
McKenzie
Melillo
Moore
Morrison
Muys
Normandin
Paul-Hus
Poilievre
Reid
Reynolds
Roberts
Ross
Ruff
Schmale
Shipley
Small
Ste-Marie
Strahl
Stubbs
Thomas
Tolmie
Vien
Vis
Waugh
Zimmer– — 153

Aitchison
Allison
Anstey
Au
Bailey
Barlow
Barsalou-Duval
Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt)
Bexte
Blanchet
Block
Borrelli
Brassard
Calkins
Chambers
Chong
Cody
Dalton
Davidson
Dawson
Deltell
Deschênes
Doherty
Duncan
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake)
Fortin
Gaudreau
Gill (Calgary Skyview)
Gill (Calgary McKnight)
Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan)
Godin
Gourde
Guglielmin
Hallan
Ho
Holman
Jansen
Kelly
Kibble
Kmiec
Kram
Kronis
Kusie
Lantsman
Lawrence
Lefebvre
Leslie
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Lobb
Majumdar
Mantle
McCauley
McLean (Calgary Centre)
Menegakis
Morin
Motz
Nater
Patzer
Perron
Redekopp
Rempel Garner
Richards
Rood
Rowe
Scheer
Seeback
Simard
Steinley
Stevenson
Strauss
Thériault
Tochor
Van Popta
Viersen
Warkentin
Williamson

NAYS

Members

Acan	Al Soud
Ali	Alty
Anand	Anandasangaree
Auguste	Bains
Baker	Bardeesy
Battiste	Beech
Begum	Belanger (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River)
Bendayan	Bittle
Blois	Brière
Caley	Carr
Casey	Chagger
Champagne	Chang
Chartrand	Chatel
Chenette	Chi
Church	Clark
Connors	Cormier
Coteau	Dandurand
Danko	d'Entremont
Deschênes-Thériault	Desrochers
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Diab	Duclos
Duguid	Dzerowicz
Earle	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Eyolfson
Fancy	Fanjoy
Fergus	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fragiskatos	Fraser
Fry	Fuhr
Gaheer	Gainey
Gasparro	Gazan
Gerretsen	Gladu
Gobeil	Gould
Grant	Greaves
Gull-Masty	Hajdu
Hanley	Harrison
Hepfner	Hirtle
Hodgson	Hogan
Housefather	Hussen
Iacono	Idlout
Jaczek	Jeneroux
Johns	Joly
Joseph	Kayabaga
Kelloway	Khalid
Klassen	Koutrakis
Lalonde	Lambropoulos
Lamoureux	Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles)
Lapointe (Sudbury)	Lattanzio
Lauzon	Lavack
Lavoie	LeBlanc
Leitão	Lightbound
Long	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
Ma	MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacDonald (Cardigan)	MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Malette (Bay of Quinte)	Maloney
Martin	May
McGuinty	McKelvie
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McKnight
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)	McPherson
Ménard	Mendès
Michel	Miedema
Miller	Mingarelli
Morrissey	Myles
Naqvi	Nathan
Nguyen	Noormohamed
Ntumba	Olszewski
O'Rourke	Osborne
Petitpas Taylor	Powlowski
Ramsay	Rana
Robertson	Rochefort
Romanado	Royer
Sahota	Saini
Sarai	Sari
Sawatzky	Schiefke
Sgro	Shahnawaz
Sheehan	Sidhu (Brampton East)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Sodhi
Solomon	Sousa
St-Pierre	Sudds
Tesser Derksen	Turnbull
Valdez	van Koeverden
Vandenbeld	Villeneuve
Watchorn	Weiler
Yip	Zahid
Zerucelli	Zuberi– — 170

PAIRED

Members

Bonin	Dabrusin
Gallant	Guay
Kwan	Plamondon
Provost	Thompson– — 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

[*English*]

CONCURRENCE IN COMMITTEE REPORTS

HUMAN RESOURCES, SKILLS AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The House resumed from October 27 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion to concur in the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 183)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif	Acan
Aitchison	Al Soud
Albas	Ali
Allison	Alty
Anand	Anandasangaree
Anderson	Anstey
Arnold	Au
Auguste	Baber
Bailey	Bains
Baker	Baldinelli
Bardeesy	Barlow
Barrett	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu
Beech	Begum
Belanger (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River)	Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt)
Bendayan	Berthold

Concurrence in Committee Reports

Bexte
Bittle
Blanchette-Joncas
Blois
Borrelli
Brassard
Brunelle-Duceppe
Calkins
Carney
Casey
Chambers
Champoux
Chartrand
Chenette
Chong
Clark
Cody
Cooper
Coteau
Dancho
Danko
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Dawson
Deltell
DeRidder
Deschênes-Thériault
Dhaliwal
Diab
Doherty
Duclos
Duncan
Earle
El-Khoury
Eyolfson
Falk (Provencher)
Fanjoy
Fisher
Fortier
Fragiskatos
Fry
Gaheer
Garon
Gaudreau
Genuis
Gill (Calgary Skyview)
Gill (Calgary McKnight)
Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan)
Gladu
Godin
Gould
Grant
Groleau
Gull-Masty
Hajdu
Hanley
Harrison
Hirtle
Hoback
Hogan
Housefather
Iacono
Jackson
Jansen
Jivani
Joly
Kayabaga
Kelly
Khanna
Kirkland
Kmiec
Koutrakis
Kramp-Neuman
Bezan
Blanchet
Block
Bonk
Bragdon
Brière
Caley
Caputo
Carr
Chagger
Champagne
Chang
Chatel
Chi
Church
Cobena
Connors
Cormier
Dalton
Dandurand
Davidson
Davies (Niagara South)
DeBellefeuille
d'Entremont
Deschênes
Desrochers
Dhillon
Diotte
Dowdall
Duguid
Dzerowicz
Ehsassi
Epp
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake)
Fancy
Fergus
Fonseca
Fortin
Fraser
Fuhr
Gainey
Gasparro
Gazan
Gerretsen
Gill (Brampton West)
Gill (Windsor West)
Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)
Gobeil
Goodridge
Gourde
Greaves
Guglielmin
Gunn
Hallan
Hardy
Hepfner
Ho
Hodgson
Holman
Hussen
Idlout
Jaczek
Jeneroux
Johns
Joseph
Kelloway
Khalid
Kibble
Klassen
Konanz
Kram
Kronis
Kuruc
Lake
Lambropoulos
Lantsman
Lapointe (Sudbury)
Lattanzio
Lavack
Lawrence
LeBlanc
Leitão
Leslie
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Lloyd
Long
Ma
MacDonald (Cardigan)
Mahal
Malette (Bay of Quinte)
Maloney
Martin
Mazier
McGuinty
McKenzie
McKnight
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)
Melillo
Mendès
Michel
Miller
Moore
Morrison
Motz
Myles
Nater
Nguyen
Normandin
Olszewski
Osborne
Paul-Hus
Petitpas Taylor
Powlowski
Rana
Reid
Reynolds
Roberts
Rochefort
Rood
Rowe
Ruff
Saini
Sari
Scheer
Schmale
Sgro
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton East)
Simard
Sodhi
Sousa
Ste-Marie
St-Pierre
Strauss
Sudds
Thériault
Tochor
Turnbull
van Koeverden
Vandenbeld
Viersen
Vis
Watchorn
Weiler
Kusie
Lalonde
Lamoureux
Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles)
Larouche
Lauzon
Lavoie
Lawton
Lefebvre
Lemire
Lewis (Essex)
Lightbound
Lobb
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Majumdar
Malette (Kapuskasing—Timmins—Mushkegowuk)
Mantle
May
McCauley
McKelvie
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLean (Calgary Centre)
McPherson
Ménard
Menegakis
Miedema
Mingarelli
Morin
Morrissey
Muys
Naqvi
Nathan
Noormohamed
Ntumba
O'Rourke
Patzer
Perron
Poilievre
Ramsay
Redekopp
Rempel Garner
Richards
Robertson
Romanado
Ross
Royer
Sahota
Sarai
Sawatzky
Schiefke
Seeback
Shahnawaz
Shipley
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Small
Solomon
Steinley
Stevenson
Strahl
Stubbs
Tesser Derksen
Thomas
Tolmie
Valdez
Van Popta
Vien
Villeneuve
Warkentin
Waugh
Williamson

Yip
Zahid
Zerucelli
Zimmer
Zuberi– — 325

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Members

Bonin
Dabrusin
Gallant
Guay
Kwan
Plamondon
Provost
Thompson– — 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

CANADA LABOUR CODE

The House resumed from October 22 consideration of the motion that Bill C-247, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-247 under Private Members' Business.

● (1550)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 184)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif
Aitchison
Albas
Allison
Anderson
Anstey
Arnold
Au
Baber
Bailey
Baldinelli
Barlow
Barrett
Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu
Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt)
Berthold
Bezan
Blanchet
Blanchette-Joncas
Block
Borrelli
Bragdon
Brassard
Brunelle-Duceppe
Calkins
Caputo
Chambers
Champoux
Chong
Cobena
Cody
Cooper
Dalton
Dancho
Davidson
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Niagara South)
Dawson
DeBellefeuille
Deltell
DeRidder
Deschênes
Diotte
Doherty
Dowdall
Duncan
Epp
Fortin
Garon
Gaudreau
Gazan
Genuis
Gill (Calgary Skyview)
Gill (Brampton West)
Gill (Calgary McKnight)
Gill (Windsor West)
Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan)

Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)
Godin
Goodridge
Gourde
Groleau
Guglielmin
Gunn
Hallan
Hardy
Ho
Hoback
Holman
Jansen
Jivani
Johns
Kelly
Khanna
Kibble
Kirkland
Kmiec
Konanz
Kram
Kronis
Kuruc
Kusie
Larouche
Lawrence
Lawton
Lefebvre
Lemire
Leslie
Lewis (Essex)
Lloyd
Lobb
Mahal
Majumdar
Malette (Kapuskasing—Timmins—Mushkegowuk)
May
Mazier
McCauley
McKenzie
McLean (Calgary Centre)
McPherson
Melillo
Menegakis
Moore
Morin
Morrison
Motz
Muys
Nater
Normandin
Paul-Hus
Perron
Poilievre
Redekopp
Reid
Rempel Garner
Reynolds
Richards
Roberts
Rood
Ross
Rowe
Ruff
Scheer
Schmale
Seeback
Shahnawaz
Shipley
Simard
Small
Steinley
Ste-Marie
Strahl
Strauss
Stubbs
Thériault
Tochor
Van Popta
Vien
Viersen
Vis
Warkentin
Waugh
Williamson
Zimmer– — 145

NAYS

Members

Acan
Al Soud
Ali
Alty
Anand
Anandasangaree
Auguste
Bains
Baker
Bardeesy
Battiste
Beech
Begum
Belanger (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River)
Bendayan
Bittle
Blois
Brière
Caley
Carney
Carr
Casey
Chagger
Champagne
Chang
Chartrand
Chatel
Chenette
Chi
Church
Clark
Connors
Cormier
Coteau
Dandurand
Danko
d'Entremont
Deschênes-Thériault
Desrochers
Dhaliwal
Dhillon
Diab
Duclos
Duguid
Dzerowicz
Earle
Ehsassi
El-Khoury

Eyolfson	Fancy
Fanjoy	Fergus
Fisher	Fonseca
Fortier	Fragiskatos
Fraser	Fry
Fuhr	Gaheer
Gainey	Gasparro
Gerretsen	Gladu
Gobeil	Gould
Grant	Greaves
Gull-Masty	Hajdu
Hanley	Harrison
Hepfner	Hirtle
Hodgson	Hogan
Housefather	Hussen
Iacono	Idlout
Jaczek	Jeneroux
Joly	Joseph
Kayabaga	Kelloway
Khalid	Klassen
Koutrakis	Lalonde
Lambropoulos	Lamoureux
Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles)	Lapointe (Sudbury)
Lattanzio	Lauzon
Lavack	Lavoie
LeBlanc	Leitão
Lightbound	Long
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)	Ma
MacDonald (Malpeque)	MacDonald (Cardigan)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)	Malette (Bay of Quinte)
Maloney	Martin
McGuinty	McKelvie
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McKnight
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)	Ménard
Mendès	Michel
Miedema	Miller
Mingarelli	Morrissey
Myles	Naqvi
Nathan	Nguyen
Noormohamed	Ntumba
Olszewski	O'Rourke
Osborne	Petitpas Taylor
Powlowski	Ramsay
Rana	Robertson
Rochefort	Romanado
Royer	Sahota
Saini	Sarai
Sari	Sawatzky
Schiefke	Sgro
Sheehan	Sidhu (Brampton East)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Sodhi
Solomon	Sousa
St-Pierre	Sudds
Tesser Derksen	Turnbull
Valdez	van Koeverden
Vandenbeld	Villeneuve
Watchorn	Weiler
Yip	Zahid
Zerucelli	Zuberi– — 166

PAIRED

Members

Bonin	Dabrusin
Gallant	Guay
Kwan	Plamondon
Provost	Thompson– — 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

[*Translation*]

NATIONAL STRATEGY ON FLOOD AND DROUGHT FORECASTING ACT

The House resumed from October 23 consideration of the motion that Bill C-241, An Act to establish a national strategy respecting flood and drought forecasting, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-241, under Private Members' Business.

● (1600)

[*English*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 185)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif	Acan
Aitchison	Al Soud
Albas	Ali
Allison	Alty
Anand	Anandasangaree
Anderson	Anstey
Arnold	Au
Auguste	Baber
Bailey	Bains
Baker	Baldinelli
Bardeesy	Barlow
Barrett	Battiste
Beech	Begum
Belanger (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River)	Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt)
Bendayan	Berthold
Bexte	Bezan
Bittle	Block
Blois	Bonk
Borrelli	Bragdon
Brassard	Brière
Caley	Calkins
Caputo	Carney
Carr	Casey
Chagger	Chambers
Champagne	Chang
Chartrand	Chatel
Chenette	Chi
Chong	Church
Clark	Cobena
Cody	Connors
Cooper	Cormier
Coteau	Dalton
Dancho	Dandurand
Danko	Davidson
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Niagara South)
Dawson	Deltell
d'Entremont	DeRidder
Deschênes-Thériault	Desrochers
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Diab	Diotte
Doherty	Dowdall
Duclos	Duguid
Duncan	Dzerowicz
Earle	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Epp
Eyolfson	Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake)
Falk (Provencher)	Fancy
Fanjoy	Fergus

Fisher
Fonseca
Fortier
Fragiskatos
Fraser
Fry
Fuhr
Gaheer
Gainey
Gasparro
Gazan
Genuis
Gerretsen
Gill (Calgary Skyview)
Gill (Brampton West)
Gill (Calgary McKnight)
Gill (Windsor West)
Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)
Gladu
Gobeil
Godin
Goodridge
Gould
Gourde
Grant
Greaves
Groleau
Guglielmin
Gull-Masty
Gunn
Hajdu
Hallan
Hanley
Hardy
Harrison
Hepfner
Hirtle
Ho
Hoback
Hodgson
Hogan
Holman
Housefather
Hussen
Iacono
Idlout
Jackson
Jaczek
Jansen
Jeneroux
Johns
Joly
Joseph
Kayabaga
Kelloway
Kelly
Khanna
Kibble
Kirkland
Klassen
Kmiec
Konanz
Koutrakis
Kram
Kramp-Neuman
Kronis
Kuruc
Kusie
Lake
Lalonde
Lambropoulos
Lamoureux
Lantsman
Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles)
Lapointe (Sudbury)
Lattanzio
Lauzon
Lavack
Lavoie
Lawrence
Lawton
LeBlanc
Lefebvre
Leitão
Leslie
Lewis (Essex)
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Lightbound
Lloyd
Lobb
Long
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
Ma
MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacDonald (Cardigan)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Mahal
Majumdar
Malette (Bay of Quinte)
Malette (Kapuskasing—Timmins—Mushkegowuk)
Maloney
Mantle
Martin
May
Mazier
McCauley
McGuinty
McKelvie
McKenzie
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McKnight
McLean (Calgary Centre)
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)
McPherson
Melillo
Ménard
Mendès
Menegakis
Michel
Miedema
Miller
Mingarelli
Moore
Morin
Morrison
Morrissey
Motz
Muys
Myles
Naqvi
Nater
Nathan
Nguyen
Noormohamed
Ntumba
Olszewski
O'Rourke
Osborne
Patzer
Paul-Hus
Petitpas Taylor
Poilievre
Powlowski
Ramsay
Rana
Redekopp
Reid
Rempel Garner
Reynolds
Richards
Roberts
Robertson
Rochefort
Romanado
Rood
Ross
Rowe
Royer
Ruff
Sahota
Saini
Sarai
Sari
Sawatzky
Scheer
Schiefke
Schmale
Seeback
Sgro
Shahnawaz
Sheehan
Shipley
Sidhu (Brampton East)
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Small
Sodhi
Solomon
Sousa
Steinley
Stevenson
St-Pierre
Strahl
Stubbs
Sudds
Tesser Derksen
Thomas
Tochor
Tolmie
Turnbull
Valdez
van Koeverden
Van Popta
Vandenbeld
Vien
Viersen
Villeneuve
Vis
Warkentin
Watchorn
Waugh
Weiler
Williamson
Yip
Zahid
Zerucelli
Zimmer
Zuberi– — 303

NAYS

Members

Barsalou-Duval
Beaulieu
Blanchet
Blanchette-Joncas
Brunelle-Duceppe
Champoux
DeBellefeuille
Deschênes
Fortin
Garon
Gaudreau
Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan)
Larouche
Lemire
Normandin
Perron
Simard
Ste-Marie
Thériault– — 19

PAIRED

Members

Bonin
Dabrusin
Gallant
Guay
Kwan
Plamondon
Provost
Thompson– — 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

AN ACT TO REPEAL CERTAIN RESTRICTIONS ON SHIPPING

The House resumed from October 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-264, An Act to repeal certain restrictions on shipping, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading stage of Bill C-264 under Private Members' Business.

● (1615)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 186)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif	Aitchison
Albas	Allison
Anderson	Anstey
Arnold	Au
Baber	Bailey
Baldinelli	Barrett
Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt)	Berthold
Bexte	Bezan
Block	Bonk
Borrelli	Bragdon
Brassard	Calkins
Caputo	Chambers
Chong	Cobena
Cody	Cooper
Dalton	Dancho
Davidson	Davies (Niagara South)
Dawson	Deltell
DeRidder	Diotte
Doherty	Dowdall
Duncan	Epp
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake)	Falk (Provencher)
Genuis	Gill (Calgary Skyview)
Gill (Brampton West)	Gill (Calgary McKnight)
Gill (Windsor West)	Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)
Godin	Goodridge
Gourde	Groleau
Guglielmin	Gunn
Hallan	Hardy
Ho	Hoback
Holman	Jackson
Jansen	Jivani
Kelly	Khanna
Kibble	Kirkland
Kmiec	Konanz
Kram	Kramp-Neuman
Kronis	Kuruc
Kusie	Lake
Lantsman	Lawrence
Lawton	Lefebvre
Leslie	Lewis (Essex)
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Lloyd
Lobb	Mahal
Majumdar	Malette (Kapuskasing—Timmins—Mushkegowuk)
Mantle	Mazier
McCauley	McKenzie
McLean (Calgary Centre)	Melillo
Menegakis	Moore
Morin	Morrison
Motz	Muys
Nater	Patzer
Paul-Hus	Poilievre
Redekopp	Reid
Rempel Garner	Reynolds
Richards	Roberts
Rood	Rowe
Ruff	Scheer
Schmale	Seeback
Shipley	Small
Steinley	Stevenson
Strahl	Strauss
Stubbs	Thomas
Tochor	Tolmie
Van Popta	Vien
Viersen	Vis
Warkentin	Waugh
Williamson	Zimmer– — 132

NAYS

Members

Acan	Al Soud
Ali	Alty
Anand	Anandasangaree
Auguste	Bains
Baker	Bardeesy
Barsalou-Duval	Battiste
Beaulieu	Beech
Begum	Belanger (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River)
Bendayan	Bittle
Blanchet	Blanchette-Joncas
Blois	Brière
Brunelle-Duceppe	Caley
Carney	Carr
Casey	Chagger
Champagne	Champoux
Chang	Chartrand
Chatel	Chenette
Chi	Church
Clark	Connors
Cormier	Coteau
Dandurand	Danko
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	DeBellefeuille
d'Entremont	Deschênes
Deschênes-Thériault	Desrochers
Dhaliwal	Dhillon
Diab	Duclos
Duguid	Dzerowicz
Earle	Ehsassi
El-Khoury	Eyolfson
Fancy	Fanjoy
Fergus	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser	Fry
Fuhr	Gaheer
Gainey	Garon
Gasparro	Gaudreau
Gazan	Gerretsen
Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan)	Gladu
Gobeil	Gould
Grant	Greaves
Gull-Masty	Hajdu
Hanley	Harrison
Hepfner	Hirtle
Hodgson	Hogan
Housefather	Hussen
Iacono	Idlout
Jaczek	Jeneroux
Johns	Joly
Joseph	Kayabaga
Kelloway	Khalid
Klassen	Koutrakis
Lalonde	Lambropoulos
Lamoureux	Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles)
Lapointe (Sudbury)	Larouche
Lattanzio	Lauzon
Lavack	Lavoie
LeBlanc	Leitão
Lemire	Lightbound
Long	Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
Ma	MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacDonald (Cardigan)	MacKinnon (Gatineau)

Malette (Bay of Quinte)	Maloney
Martin	May
McGuinty	McKelvie
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)	McKnight
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)	McPherson
Ménard	Mendès
Michel	Miedema
Miller	Mingarelli
Morrissey	Myles
Naqvi	Nathan
Nguyen	Noormohamed
Normandin	Ntumba
Olszewski	O'Rourke
Osborne	Perron
Petitpas Taylor	Powlowski
Ramsay	Rana
Robertson	Rochefort
Romanado	Royer
Sahota	Saini
Sarai	Sari
Sawatzky	Schiefke
Sgro	Shahnawaz
Sheehan	Sidhu (Brampton East)
Sidhu (Brampton South)	Simard
Sodhi	Solomon
Sousa	Ste-Marie
St-Pierre	Sudds
Tesser Derksen	Thériault
Turnbull	Valdez
van Koeverden	Vandenbeld
Villeneuve	Watchorn
Weiler	Yip
Zahid	Zerucelli
Zuberi– — 191	

PAIRED

Members

Bonin	Dabrusin
Gallant	Guay
Kwan	Plamondon
Provost	Thompson– — 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

* * *

[*English*]

RELIEVING GRIEVING PARENTS OF AN ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN ACT (EVAN'S LAW)

The House resumed from October 27 consideration of the motion that Bill C-222, An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Canada Labour Code (death of a child), be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: We will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading of Bill C-222, under Private Members' Business.

● (1625)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 187)

YEAS

Members

Aboultaif	Acan
Aitchison	Al Soud
Albas	Ali
Allison	Alty
Anand	Anandasangaree
Anderson	Anstey
Arnold	Au
Auguste	Baber
Bailey	Bains
Baker	Baldinelli
Bardeesy	Barlow
Barrett	Barsalou-Duval
Battiste	Beaulieu
Beech	Begum
Belanger (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River)	Bélanger (Sudbury East—Manitoulin—Nickel Belt)
Bendayan	Berthold
Bexte	Bezan
Bittle	Blanchet
Blanchette-Joncas	Block
Blois	Bonk
Borrelli	Bragdon
Brassard	Brière
Brunelle-Duceppe	Caley
Calkins	Caputo
Carney	Carr
Casey	Chagger
Chambers	Champagne
Champoux	Chang
Chartrand	Chatel
Chenette	Chi
Chong	Church
Clark	Cobena
Cody	Connors
Cooper	Cormier
Coteau	Dabrusin
Dalton	Dancho
Dandurand	Danko
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Niagara South)	Dawson
DeBellefeuille	Deltell
d'Entremont	DeRidder
Deschênes	Deschênes-Thériault
Desrochers	Dhaliwal
Dhillon	Diab
Diotte	Doherty
Dowdall	Duclos
Duguid	Duncan
Dzerowicz	Earle
Ehsassi	El-Khoury
Epp	Eyolfson
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake)	Falk (Provencher)
Fancy	Fanjoy
Fergus	Fisher
Fonseca	Fortier
Fortin	Fragiskatos
Fraser	Fry
Fuhr	Gaheer
Gainey	Garon
Gasparro	Gaudreau
Gazan	Genuis
Gerretsen	Gill (Calgary Skyview)
Gill (Brampton West)	Gill (Calgary McKnight)
Gill (Windsor West)	Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan)
Gill (Abbotsford—South Langley)	Gladu
Gobeil	Godin
Goodridge	Gould
Gourde	Grant
Greaves	Groleau
Guglielmin	Gull-Masty
Gunn	Hajdu
Hallan	Hanley
Hardy	Harrison
Hepfner	Hirtle
Ho	Hoback
Hodgson	Hogan

Holman
Hussen
Idlout
Jaczek
Jeneroux
Johns
Joseph
Kelloway
Khalid
Kibble
Klassen
Konanz
Kram
Kronis
Kusie
Lalonde
Lantsman
Lapointe (Sudbury)
Lattanzio
Lavack
Lawrence
LeBlanc
Leitão
Leslie
Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Lloyd
Long
Ma
MacDonald (Cardigan)
Mahal
Malette (Bay of Quinte)
Maloney
Martin
Mazier
McGuinty
McKenzie
McKnight
McLean (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke)
Melillo
Mendès
Michel
Miller
Moore
Morrison
Motz
Myles
Nater
Nguyen
Normandin
Olszewski
Osborne
Paul-Hus
Petitpas Taylor
Powlowski
Rana
Reid
Reynolds
Roberts
Rochefort
Rood
Rowe
Ruff
Saini
Sari
Scheer
Schmale
Sgro
Sheehan
Sidhu (Brampton East)
Simard
Sodhi
Sousa
Housefather
Iacono
Jackson
Jansen
Jivani
Joly
Kayabaga
Kelly
Khanna
Kirkland
Kmiec
Koutrakis
Kramp-Neuman
Kuruc
Lake
Lamoureux
Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles)
Larouche
Lauzon
Lavoie
Lawton
Lefebvre
Lemire
Lewis (Essex)
Lightbound
Lobb
Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga)
MacDonald (Malpeque)
MacKinnon (Gatineau)
Majumdar
Malette (Kapuskasing—Timmins—Mushkegowuk)
Mantle
May
McCauley
McKelvie
McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam)
McLean (Calgary Centre)
McPherson
Ménard
Menegakis
Miedema
Mingarelli
Morin
Morrissey
Muys
Naqvi
Nathan
Noormohamed
Ntumba
O'Rourke
Patzer
Perron
Poilievre
Ramsay
Redekopp
Rempel Garner
Richards
Robertson
Romanado
Ross
Royer
Sahota
Sarai
Sawatzky
Schiefke
Seeback
Shahnawaz
Shipley
Sidhu (Brampton South)
Small
Solomon
Steinley
Ste-Marie
St-Pierre
Strauss
Sudds
Thériault
Tochor
Turnbull
van Koeverden
Vandenbeld
Viersen
Vis
Watchorn
Weiler
Yip
Zerucelli
Zuberi– — 325
Stevenson
Strahl
Stubbs
Tesser Derksen
Thomas
Tolmie
Valdez
Van Popta
Vien
Villeneuve
Warkentin
Waugh
Williamson
Zahid
Zimmer

NAYS

Nil

PAIRED

Members

Bonin
Gallant
Kwan
Provost
Dabrusin
Guay
Plamondon
Thompson– — 8

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-41—PROPOSAL TO APPLY STANDING ORDER 69.1

Andrew Lawton (Elgin—St. Thomas—London South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to request the division of Bill C-41 for voting purposes, pursuant to Standing Order 69.1. Standing Order 69.1(1) says the following:

> In the case where a government bill seeks to repeal, amend or enact more than one act, and where there is not a common element connecting the various provisions or where unrelated matters are linked, the Speaker shall have the power to divide the questions, for the purposes of voting, on the motion for second reading and reference to a committee and the motion for third reading and passage of the bill. The Speaker shall have the power to combine clauses of the bill thematically and to put the aforementioned questions on each of these groups of clauses separately, provided that there will be a single debate at each stage.

Bill C-41 seeks to do two fundamental things. That is to say, the bill stands for two separate principles. The bill seeks to stop the forthcoming expansion of medical assistance in dying to people whose sole underlying condition is a mental illness. It also seeks to allow medical assistance in dying for people who have no capacity to consent but who requested MAID before they lost capacity, otherwise known as advance requests. These are two fundamentally different questions that must, I submit, be voted on separately. The bill, as worded, would also fundamentally change the nature of the MAID regime by partially removing it from the realm of criminal law insofar as advance requests are concerned. This is another matter that speaks to both the complexity of the bill and its omnibus nature, which I believe warrants your prerogative to divide the question pursuant to Standing Order 69.1.

Based on my preliminary reading of the bill, there should be two separate questions: one on the mental health expansion in clauses 9, 10 and 14, which concern a statute passed in 2021, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying), as amended in 2023 and 2024, together with subclause 4(2) of Bill C-41 on the same subject matter; and the second question on MAID for people who cannot consent, otherwise known as advance requests, in the remaining provisions of Bill C-41, which propose amendments to a different act, the Criminal Code, plus consequential cross-references in three other statutes.

I recognize that these matters concern medical assistance in dying. However, the question under Standing Order 69.1 is not simply whether the provisions fall within the same broad policy area, but rather, whether they are sufficiently distinct so as to warrant separate votes. Speaker Regan addressed this contrast in a bill containing multiple principles while addressing a singular field of policy in his March 1, 2018, ruling at page 17551 of the Debates. He stated:

> In presenting arguments relating to Bill C-63, the hon. member for Calgary Shepard raised an interesting concept from the practice in the Quebec National Assembly. Quoting from page 400 of *Parliamentary Procedure in Québec*, he stated:
>
> "The principle or principles contained in a bill must not be confused with the field it concerns. To frame the concept of principle in that way would prevent the division of most bills, because they apply to a specific field."
>
> While their procedure for dividing bills is quite different from ours, the idea of distinguishing the principles of a bill from its field has stayed with me. While each bill is different and so too each case, I believe that Standing Order 69.1 can indeed be applied to a bill where all of the initiatives relate to a specific policy area, if those initiatives are sufficiently distinct to warrant a separate decision of the House.

To that end, Mr. Speaker, I submit that you should approach Bill C-41, legislation which quite literally concerns life and death, in a fundamentally different way from how you might consider a request to, say, separate a transportation bill with respect to its rail clauses and its aviation clauses. Stopping the expansion of MAID to people with mental illness was the subject of Bill C-218, which the Liberal government voted against earlier this session, citing an intention to bring forward the legislation it tabled yesterday, Bill C-41. In the absence of legislation, this expansion will go into effect March 17, 2027. You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that this deadline has been twice delayed by the Liberals, citing the need for further study and further readiness.

● (1630)

In this Parliament, the Special Joint Committee on Medical Assistance in Dying was re-established, with the narrow mandate of exploring the forthcoming mental illness expansion. The culmination of the study was a singular recommendation, supported by Liberal and Conservative members of the committee, that the expansion not proceed. This was an incredibly important act of bipartisan co-operation on what, I reiterate, is a life-and-death matter. This work underscores the importance of allowing parliamentarians to consider the mental health expansion of MAID on its own merit rather than marrying it to the separate and also consequential question about advance requests.

During the course of the committee's hearings, we heard from many experts, including MAID practitioners, who oppose MAID for people with mental illness but support MAID itself. There are those who support MAID for people with mental illness but not MAID for people without the capacity to consent, just as the inverse is undoubtedly true. On these questions of conscience, members should be free to vote individually on each of these two distinct questions.

In approaching the exercise of your authority under Standing Order 69.1, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage you to draw inspiration from the way in which the Chair uses its discretion on the selection of report stage amendments when a matter of conscience comes before the House. While on most bills, the criteria are applied in a clinical manner, the Chair will, on matters of conscience, approach the exercise in a more generous fashion.

Two such cases concern earlier iterations of medical assistance in dying legislation. On the original MAID bill, Bill C-14, Mr. Speaker Regan said, at page 3485 of the Debates on May 17, 2016:

> The Chair appreciates the arguments put forward by hon. members as to why they consider these amendments to be of such significance as to warrant further consideration at report stage. I recognize that this is an important issue on which many members have strong and varied opinions. The Chair notes that the bill before us is unique, in its far-reaching social, moral and constitutional implications. The Chair also notes that, given the variety of opinions expressed by various members in all parties in relation to the provisions of this once-in-a-generation bill, the Chair is open to the argument of exceptional significance as contemplated in our Standing Orders. For these reasons, the Chair is prepared, on this occasion, to give members the benefit of the doubt....

Similar views were expressed concerning the later Bill C-7, by the Assistant Deputy Speaker, on November 27, 2020, at page 2603 of the Debates:

> As with the original medical assistance in dying legislation four years ago, I recognize that this is an important issue with profound legal, moral and constitutional dimensions and that members have strongly held and varied points of view on these matters.
>
> For these reasons, the Chair is prepared on this occasion to give members the benefit of the doubt....

To return to the threshold for dividing votes set out in the relevant standing order, I submit here that there is a sound basis for you to find that, despite the common element between the key questions involving MAID itself, the measures are fundamentally distinct from one another, with separate political, moral and legal implications, and for that matter, distinct levels of support and opposition among Canadians and, I suspect, Parliamentarians as well.

In closing, the disparate objectives of Bill C-41 warrant your prerogative as Chair to divide the question for the purposes of voting.

● (1635)

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the member for his intervention. Of course, the Speaker will take it back to make a decision on it.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order to indicate that we would like the opportunity to respond to the point of order that has been raised before you make your ruling.

The Deputy Speaker: It is noted.

I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions, the time provided for government orders will be extended by 73 minutes.

[*Translation*]

It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Nanaimo—Ladysmith, Finance; the hon. member for Yellowhead, The Economy.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on National Defence, entitled "The Department of National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Contaminated Sites".

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

* * *

PETITIONS

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour for me to table petition e-7590.

As members are likely aware, I often like to tell individuals in the chamber that my riding has the highest percentage of Korean Canadians out of all 343 ridings in our country. Bearing that in mind, and given that some of them are here in the gallery today, it is a great honour—

● (1640)

The Deputy Speaker: I have to interrupt the member. A member cannot mention a presence or absence, and especially of people who are in the gallery. Only the Speaker can make reference to those who are in the gallery. I will allow the member to continue and to finish, but the member has to remember not to make reference to people in the gallery.

Hon. Ali Ehsassi: Mr. Speaker, the petition is regarding the Korean War armistice of 1953.

As we are all aware, one of the proudest moments in our current history was when Canada contributed to the Republic of Korea during the Korean War. In fact, we were the third-largest contributor to that effort. Over 26,000 Canadians served in the Korean War, and of course, 516 gave their lives. As a result of that, and given the flourishing relationship between the Republic of Korea and Canada, and the sizable community of Korean Canadians from coast to coast to coast, petitioners are presenting this petition. It is about how the absence of a peace agreement will certainly fuel military tension and humanitarian suffering in the Korean region.

Petitioners have requested that we publicly support international efforts to negotiate a formal peace agreement replacing the 1953 armistice. They are requesting that we work with allies, including the Republic of Korea, to advance multilateral diplomacy toward durable peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. They also ask for the tabling in Parliament of a report outlining our strategy for a permanent peace settlement. Finally, they ask that we demonstrate global leadership by advocating in international forums for peaceful conflict resolution and a formal peace settlement on the Korean peninsula.

[*Translation*]

PROTECTION OF DEEP SEABEDS

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Listuguj, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I am tabling a petition from Greenpeace Canada, Oceans North and MiningWatch Canada that calls for the protection of deep seabeds; it is signed by 10,398 people.

In 2023, Canada announced its support for a moratorium on deep sea mining in international waters. However, a business registered in Canada, The Metals Company, holds exploration contracts in the Pacific. This Canadian company also responded to the Trump administration's call to seek authorization to mine the seabed under U.S. legislation, in breach of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Deep seabeds are mankind's shared heritage. We have a responsibility to protect our oceans for future generations. Accordingly, this petition calls on the government to clearly prohibit any Canadian individual or company from undertaking deep sea mining activities.

I am honoured to table this petition in the House.

[*English*]

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Terry Dowdall (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to rise on behalf of petitioners in Simcoe—Grey.

An individual, Erin Small, started a petition that has quite a few signatures on it. The petitioners are very disappointed in the judicial system with respect to intimate partner violence.

They are calling for the implementation of strict conflict of interest rules requiring investigating officers to disclose any personal or professional relationship with either the accused or the victim, with mandatory reassignment where a conflict exists. They also call for reform of mandatory charging policies to prevent survivors from being criminalized when the accused attempts to countercharge the victim. Third, they ask us to ensure that sexual assault charges cannot be resolved through peace bonds, diversion agreements or other non-conviction resolutions without judicial oversight and clear public interest justification.

They also ask that we remove barriers to victim impact statements by allowing survivors to provide statements, regardless of the final judicial outcome. Finally, they are asking for the creation of independent civilian oversight bodies to review investigative failures, wrongful countercharges, mishandled cases and systemic bias within police and prosecutorial systems.

● (1645)

WOOD PRESERVATIVES

Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of concerned Canadians.

Since October 2023, Health Canada has prohibited all pentachlorophenol wood preservative products used to treat Douglas fir utility poles. Basically, all the stock had to be used by this month.

The petitioners highlight that DCOI is an arsenic-free, chromium-free and dioxin-free preservative that has been standardized by the American Wood Protection Association since 1989 and has been approved by the United States and Europe for use in wood preservatives. Of the four pole preservatives registered in Canada, only creosote is oil-borne, leaving utilities without a modern oil-borne option, causing fir logs to be uncoated and hence unusable as utility poles.

There are only three processing plants left, and this has resulted in Canadian fir being exported to the United States for further processing, which could have been done right here in Canada. There is a loss of jobs, and it is not really helping the environment in the long run. This is an important issue the petitioners are bringing forward.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all notices of motions for the production of papers also be allowed to stand at this time.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA ACT

The House resumed from October 21 consideration of the motion that Bill C-34, An Act to enact the Digital Safety Act and the Digital Safety Commission of Canada Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the beginning of my comments, I will emphasize that the government, coming out of the last federal election, made commitments to Canadians in regard to the Internet and how we can protect children. That is really what Bill C-34 is all about.

If we were to canvass and talk to the constituents we represent, we would find that there is genuine concern in regard to some of the harmful things that are on the Internet. The bill is not meant to replace parents but is rather to support parents. The Internet is 24-7. There are things on it that are very harmful, particularly for children 16 and under, and there is a role for government to play.

We have seen other countries take action, as we are taking action. I appeal to my colleagues across the way to listen to what is being expressed through our constituents, which is genuine concern over the harmful things that take place on the Internet, and vote accordingly in regard to Bill C-34.

The bill is a solution, in good part, that would protect and complement what parents have to go through in raising a child. The Internet did not exist when my children were young, and I can only imagine what parents today have to go through given the seven-day-a-week, 24-hour availability of the Internet. The Internet is going to power our economy and society in many positive ways; there is no doubt about that, but to ignore the potential harm, particularly to our children, would be irresponsible.

We have had other private members' bills on the issue of our children and what is on the Internet that causes problems. I made a note of some of those things. We can think of what harmful content is. I have heard Conservatives talk about it, and obviously many members of the Liberal caucus have had opportunities both inside and outside of the House to talk about it. These are the types of discussions that take place in our communities.

There are things such as sexually victimizing a child, revictimizing a survivor, using intimate content without the consent of the person and inducing a child to harm themselves. Just the other day, a Conservative MP was talking about an incident where committing suicide was being promoted. Unfortunately, these are the types of things we see. They are things that promote extreme hatred or violence, or that deal with issues like terrorism and the promotion of terrorism. One could easily classify these things, I would suggest, as harmful content.

It is one thing to talk about harmful content. I suspect if we were to canvass the House, we would find virtually unanimous consent that there is harmful content on the Internet. The challenge I put across the way to my Conservative friends in particular is, what are they prepared to do about it? Bill C-34 has an action that would protect children and support parents. That is why I believe it is time for us to not only talk about this, but look at taking substantial action.

● (1650)

The establishment of an independent digital safety commission is long overdue. It would have a profound, positive impact on the children of Canada no matter where they live. If members believe that there is harm on the Internet and we have a role to play in Ottawa, I suggest that supporting an independent digital safety commission is something they ought to be voting in favour of. If they cannot vote in favour of it, I believe they owe an explanation to their constituents as to why they do not see the merit in doing that.

Having a commission that has the ability to ensure there is a higher sense of responsibility and duty to act responsibly is critically important. We could regulate service providers, as an example, to assess and mitigate risks in the form of a report, with a sense of accountability and transparency. We could enable the commission to do the follow-through, to the degree that it would have the ability to go after the major players, not only here but also abroad, and levy fines.

These are all ways in which we can play a role in protecting the children of Canada by having a ban on social media content for children under the age of 16, with the opportunity for some exceptions if they are proven to be safe for our children. This is good legislation. I hope every member of the House will get behind it and vote for it.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Listuguj, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois definitely believes that social media needs to be regulated. It is a new sector, and we are already seeing serious harms emerge. Most recently, in August, Meta agreed to a settlement and paid $16 billion in compensation for the harm caused to young people.

Quebec has already undertaken a collective review with the aim of protecting our young people from screen time, and it has made significant progress in that endeavour. The Select Committee on the Impacts of Screens and Social Media on Young People's Health and Development tabled a report recommending a ban on social media for children aged 14 and under, rather than 16 and under, as proposed in Bill C-34.

My question for my colleague is this: Will the government respect Quebec's jurisdiction over youth protection? Has the report been consulted and has the question been asked—

● (1655)

The Deputy Speaker: I must interrupt the member to give the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader the opportunity to reply.

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to chat with the minister responsible for the legislation earlier today. He amplified and explained in great detail the degree to which there is a high level of expertise.

The age has been well documented. If the member believes that the age should be lowered, he should attend the standing committee and make his case. If he is inclined to suggest that he has the evidence and science that demonstrate that it would be better to lower it, he should share it with the minister.

There are certain aspects of note in the legislation, but I will wait for my next question.

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very concerned about the implication of children being exposed in particular to pornographic content online. This is a major and still underdiscussed issue and problem. Many children are exposed to pornography online at the age of nine, 10, 11 or 12 years old, and it has significant negative implications for them, their understanding and their expectations.

In looking at this bill, my understanding is that it deals with some of this content if it is on social media websites. It does not deal with other situations outside of social media where young people may encounter this content. I think it is incumbent on us to work together to look at this and/or other legislation that addresses it.

I wonder if the member could comment on ensuring that children are not accessing this material not only on social media but anywhere else.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, the minister has made very clear that he wants to work collaboratively. The simple message that needs to get across is that there is a role for the Parliament of Canada to protect the interests of our children from the negative side, the very hurtful side, of social media and the Internet. I would suggest to the member opposite, who I know has a number of young children, that this is not to take away any sort of parenting from the child, but is rather to complement the parent's role. At the end of the day, there is a wonderful opportunity to have that dialogue. The minister is very much open to it, and I look forward to ongoing discussions both here and at committee.

Wade Grant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I too grew up in an era that did not have the Internet. All we had was a land line, which we used to phone our friends to talk to them. However, I am the father of two young children. My daughter is now 15, and, of course, she is exposed to things like social media. I have seen things that I have never had to deal with. I wish I could protect her 24 hours a day, seven days a week, but unfortunately we cannot do that.

The member talked about protecting children. I have heard it from a lot of parents. He has probably heard it from a lot of parents. Can he expand on how he feels this bill would protect them going forward?

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question, because it is important to recognize that Bill C-34 would create the digital safety act. It would regulate major social media services, AI chat services and some other online services. Through those regulations, we would have the opportunity to have them enforced by the safety commission.

Melissa Lantsman (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to split my time.

In 1965, The Who sang *The Kids Are Alright*. In 1998, The Offspring answered that with *The Kids Aren't Alright*. That was before Instagram and Snapchat and before strangers across the world could come into a child's bedroom.

Today, that answer is truer than ever, and I think most would agree in the House the kids are not all right. They are being hooked by algorithms engineered on purpose to keep them scrolling past midnight because every extra minute they scroll is worth money to somebody on the other side. They are being bullied in ways that never log off, and they are being hunted in their own bedrooms by predators who never have to pass a parent's bedroom. A generation ago, a child's bedroom door was a wall, and now it is a window to the entire world.

There are no Liberal kids and there are no Conservative kids. There are no NDP kids. There are just kids, so I want to approach this bill, Bill C-34, in a way that any parent would: not asking whether it sounds good, but whether it actually keeps people safe.

Every member of the House knows the name Amanda Todd. She was 12 years old when a stranger in the Netherlands hiding behind 22 different aliases found her online. He coerced her. He captured images of her. He threatened to send them to everyone she loved, and then he did. Weeks before she died, Amanda held out flash cards to a camera one at a time and told the world what was happening to her. She was 15 when she took her own life, and she carried all of that alone. Then it took 10 years to put the man responsible behind bars, and by then he had been convicted of crimes against 33 other young people.

We told ourselves that this would not happen again. Then came Carson Cleland, 12 years old, from Prince George. A sextortionist found him on Snapchat, an app whose own rules said that he was too young to be on there. Nobody stopped him from signing up. Nobody stopped the stranger from finding him. My colleague from Cariboo—Prince George told the House it was just 12 hours from the first threat to his death. His father said it best when he said our kids are "not built for adult problems in a kid's world."

For Amanda, justice took a decade. For Carson, the harm took half a day. The predators get faster and the laws do not keep up. Amanda and Carson are not rare. They are just names that we know. Behind them, there are thousands of names that we do not know of thousands of other cases.

In 2023, Canadian police recorded almost 20,000 incidents of online sexual exploitation, up 59% in a single year. That is more than 50 cases a day. Sextortion reports to Cybertip.ca rose 300% between 2020 and 2025. Where the victim is known, more than four out of five are boys, boys like Carson. Nearly two-thirds of cases happen on Instagram or Snapchat or some app on some kids' phones tonight. These companies have the data, the engineers and the billions, but they have lacked will.

One in four Canadian youth has been cyber-bullied. In a classroom of 28 people, that is seven kids. Every one of those numbers is a child on the edge of their bed at two in the morning with a phone glowing in the dark, scrolling and too ashamed to wake their parents up to tell them what happened. Here is a number I want every member of the House to remember: Nine in 10 Canadian teens who were sexually victimized online were harmed in private messages. It was not the public feed and not in the DMs, but behind a closed door on a screen that no parent can see.

There are ideas in this bill that deserve our attention, there is no question, such as a duty on platforms to act responsibly, a 24-hour takedown of child sexual abuse material and non-consensual intimate images and a duty on AI chatbots to connect a child in crisis with an actual real person.

For years, we let these platforms police themselves. They buried the safety fixtures six menus deep. Self-regulation has had its chance and it has failed kids. Parents were too busy maybe to find it six menu items deep. An idea on paper has never really protected a child. What matters is how the law works on an ordinary Wednesday night like tonight when a stranger sends that first message. Those questions cannot be settled just on the floor in a short debate. The committee has to do some work on this.

● (1700)

These are some of the questions. First, would it reach the harm where it happens? Private messaging where nine out of 10 victims are harmed would be expressly excluded from the bill's duties. We want to know why. Committees should ask what safety-by-design duties, like stopping strangers from messaging minors by default, could protect kids in the DMs without anybody reading their messages.

Second, what would the rules actually say? This has not been clear in the legislation. Roughly 50 key decisions in this legislation are left until after passage: 19 of them for cabinet and 31 of them for a commission that does not actually exist yet. Which platforms are covered? What is safety by design? Are gaming platforms in there or at all, or will that only come later? Parliament should vote on the whole house, not just a framework of it.

Third, we all have seen the example of Australia. We want to know what it teaches us. Australia went first, so we do not really have to guess. Platforms there shut down 4.7 million children's accounts in the first month, but three months in, its own regulator found that teen social media use had barely moved. It went from 86% to 81%. About half of the teens still online said that nobody even checked their age. As a result, parents became less aware about what their kids were doing because of it. A ban with a weak age check is not really a ban at all. It is like leaving the key under the mat at the front door. It does not really keep kids out. It moves them out of their parents' sight, or it moves them, in the case of Australia, to other platforms that are not captured within the legislation.

Fourth, we want to know if the penalties are strong enough. The last online harm bill, which was a terrible bill in this House, set the minimum fees at 6% of global revenue. This one would cut that to 3%. There are some questions about why. For some of the richest companies in history, a fine that they can budget for is not really a punishment. It is like a licensing fee that they work into the cost of doing business.

Fifth, does it touch the actual business model? On these platforms, kids are not the customers. Their attention is actually the product. That is the problem. Our own heritage committee recommended banning targeted ads and data harvesting aimed at minors. The government declined, while admitting that the algorithmic feeds drive the actual addictive designs. We want to know more about that, certainly.

Finally, most importantly, the member before me spoke about the digital safety commission, but who will watch the watchdog? Who will write these rules? What judge would enforce this? Is it five people? Is it one person? The legislation really is not clear on any of that, so we would like to hear more from the government. Hopefully we will get that in the course of this debate in this House. What recourse does a family have when the platform fails a child?

Through all of this, there is one principle that should guide everyone here: Parents know their kids better than any government or tech company ever could. A mother can tell her son to put his phone down and go to sleep, but what she cannot do is out-muscle an algorithm built by thousands of engineers to keep him awake at night. A good law does not take her place. It stands beside her.

I hope that we have that conversation in this House. There must be a law that protects all privacy. It is the work of the committee not to blindly support something that needs clarity, but to hear from the experts and parents like Carson's parents. It must be a law that protects adults' privacy too. We cannot find every user under 16 without checking every user over 16, so there are some real questions about what that could mean for every parent and grandparent who would have to give their identification to a platform. Who stores that data and for how long? What happens when it is breached? It is not a question of if, but it is a question of when.

I will end with this. A paper tiger does not keep a child safe. It does not stop a predator and it gives no parent peace of mind, so it is important to get this right. We owe it to the families of Carson and Amanda and thousands of others.

I started by saying the kids are not all right and I mean it. The kids are not all right today, but if we ask the hard questions and put down good legislation to keep kids safe, then maybe they will be all right.

● (1705)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what I like about the legislation is that by establishing the commission it does not just talk to it. My understanding is that there would be between three to five members on the commission who would have the ability through regulation to put in fines, and so forth. The commission would actually have teeth. I think that is so critically important.

Does the Conservative Party in principle support the concept of having that commission?

● (1710)

Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, the legislation is really unclear about the commission, and that is the answer we are trying to seek in the House. It could be three to five and it could be one, and that one is left up to regulation after the legislation.

The question that we have in the House is to make it clear. I know the member opposite has read the legislation so I am not suggesting that he has not, but he has not made it clear to this House, the legislation has not made it clear to this House and the minister has not made it clear to the public.

Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member made mention of Amanda Todd. I have met the mother. Amanda lived in my community, Maple Ridge, and also in Port Coquitlam. At 12 years old, she was persuaded to expose herself, then she was blackmailed, went through years of bullying and ended up killing herself. What happened was terrible. I know that Conservatives want children to be protected online because they are vulnerable.

I just responded to a letter today from a constituent. She said her 12-year-old granddaughter received communication through social media from two young men who, in their posts, threatened to kill and rape her 12-year-old granddaughter and said that she should kill herself. This is happening. This was reported to the police. Parents, families and children are feeling very vulnerable.

I wonder if the member could talk a bit about this bill in the sense that we want something to happen, we want them to be protected, but how much bureaucracy is going to be involved as opposed to really getting the job done of protecting our kids?

Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, Amanda Todd held up flashcards because she believed that the people who would know her story would then act.

In the case of Carson Cleland, also from B.C., his parents spoke out during the hardest days of their lives because he had hoped that people would act. They did their part. I think it is incumbent on this House to truly look at this legislation very carefully and make sure that it is not just words on paper, that it has teeth, that we do not follow the example of Australia where it does not work, that we give parents the tools to parent, that we stand side by side with parents rather than letting the government parent their kids. That is what parents want to see from this legislation, and it is incumbent on the House to take this to committee and really study it.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Mitis—Matapédia—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague on her speech. I believe we share the same point of view on the need to regulate digital safety, particularly for children.

I would like to hear her thoughts on the new digital safety commission that will be established. We do not know the parameters or what powers it will have. We also do not know which platforms it will regulate.

Does my colleague not think that the government is doing things a bit backwards?

As legislators, we are being asked to pass a bill, but we do not have a full understanding of the parameters involved.

[*English*]

Melissa Lantsman: Mr. Speaker, there is very much agreement with the member who just asked the question. It is hard to vote on something that you know halfway. We do not know anything about this commission. We do have a very live example in one of our country's closest allies, where pieces of this did not work. We know that putting 20 different social media companies into a piece of legislation just drives people into other ones where they are not actually off and it drives parents to put trust in the government where it does not deserve trust.

There are a lot more questions than answers in this legislation and that is exactly where we are on it.

Helena Konanz (Similkameen—South Okanagan—West Kootenay, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-34, more commonly known as the safe social media act.

I believe that everyone in the House agrees that the rapid development of social media has created enormous challenges for families across Canada and the world. What is the answer to this challenge? The vast web of global connection it has brought us has also created serious mental health and addiction challenges for children and teens.

As a mother of two grown children, I saw the beginnings of this phenomenon, with the Internet's opening and expansion into digital spaces, when my children were very young. As early as the mid-1990s, the centre for online addiction was established and Internet addiction disorder was first recognized. In 1997, the New York Times wrote that psychologists are beginning to treat patients who spend 40, 50 or 60 hours a week in chat rooms and online games, ignoring spouses, children and jobs. They described the classic cycle of tolerance, withdrawal and a desperate reliance on the glowing terminal for emotional gratification.

This could well describe the same challenges we face today but, instead of just addicted adults, it is children whose health and development are being harmed. The Internet's uniquely absorbent nature, along with chat rooms and online games, has only become more dangerous because of smart phones, algorithms and AI models. Nowadays, these addictive and mind-altering spaces have become available anytime, anywhere.

Ask any parent or teacher, and we will find that children view their digital lives as intertwined with their everyday lives. Purely online friends and hangouts have become commonplace. These spaces let them educate and express themselves. It is why children and teens report the longest screen time and highest social media use of any age group. We know that spending seven-plus hours on personal screen time is significantly more likely to lead to anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts. These platforms were never designed for children, yet children are vulnerable to their design.

Recommendations for algorithms, push notifications, endless scrolling and autoplay can repeatedly direct them toward content that keeps them engaged. These design choices can amplify exposure to harmful material and make it difficult for young users to disengage. At the same time, AI chatbots and digital companions are becoming increasingly integrated into the platforms young people use, creating new and largely untested risks.

Parents who once set computer time now know that these barriers do not exist when children under 10 can readily access TikTok, Instagram and ChatGPT. They cannot control their children's algorithms or be notified when harmful material appears.

One of the most tragic case studies on this subject involves the death, last year, of 13-year-old British Columbian Maddy Croswell. Her parents and the coroner's office found this case of teen suicide to have occurred after a social media platform she was using repeatedly pushed hundreds of hours of harmful content onto her feed advocating self-harm and eventual suicide.

Her parents thought they had done everything right. They had parental controls on her phone. They monitored her screen time. They believed they had created a safe, loving home environment, but it was not enough. Sadly, many more cases like this exist across Canada. Parental involvement is not enough to challenge the enormous reach of social media algorithms that can push dangerous and harmful content to young children and teens.

According to Stats Canada, one in four children aged 12 to 17 experienced cyber-bullying. Police reported that online child sexual exploitation incidents reached 16,000 in 2024, up 347% from 2014. I have heard from many parents about the helplessness they feel and the fear they have for their children. They feel they are in a David versus Goliath battle with Meta, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube.

● (1715)

AI companies and their algorithms are also increasingly dangerous in this respect. Reports that the shooter at Tumbler Ridge was assisted in planning this deadly shooting by ChatGPT is sickening for all Canadians. OpenAI's failure to report clear warnings of violence has left a community devastated for generations to come.

Parliament must act on this, but as lawmakers we must ensure that what we pass is good law, not just good intentions. For myself, I would like to see legislation that accomplishes three main goals: protect children and teens from harmful content online; set clear rules on tech giants that affect all our lives; and put more control in parents' hands, not the government's.

Canada also has the opportunity with this legislation to review other jurisdictions that have established similar measures and see what has worked and what has not. Australia, which was the first to move forward with the social media ban for those under 16, has found that the measure it chose to restrict access has frequently been circumvented. Surveys by Australia's eSafety Commissioner showed that 61% to 70% of young Australians aged 12 to 15 who previously used restricted platforms still have active accounts. Children still using the apps report that it is easy to bypass the restrictions and still have active accounts. If we were to ask children nowadays what they think about this type of bill, they would say that they would find a way to get through if they have to. Teens easily dodge the rules by lying about their birth year, having older teens create new accounts or using facial recognition workarounds.

Platforms also do not always enforce regulations consistently across their sites. We have also had concerning evidence that bans in other countries led to a spike in teenagers using virtual private networks, VPNs, to mask their country of origin when accessing social media platforms. Using VPNs often means youth are accessing unregulated underground platforms that could lead them to more unsafe content rather than less.

What can we do to get ahead of this? We have to consider the downstream consequences. If we ask any teenage visitor to the House of Commons today whether a ban we enacted would discourage them from accessing Instagram or TikTok, they would probably laugh and say no. That is why we need to ensure the bill has real teeth, not just vague regulation for future bureaucrats to interpret. For example, Bill C-34 leaves the definition of “regulated social media services” to future regulations, but will it be based strictly on active Canadian user accounts, annual revenue or specific platform features? Will the age restrictions be determined by facial recognition, ID uploads or credit cards?

What about privacy? Who will be asked to store this information? Would it be government, third parties or tech giants themselves? How long can they store it, and how secure will it be?

The bill's regulations for chatbot services will soon face open-ended AI models that let almost any website create a functioning chatbot service for everything from customer service to online shopping.

Given the Liberals' poor track record on online regulation and censorship, the House must move carefully as it considers Bill C-34. Previous failures and fiascos, such as Bill C-11 and Bill C-63, infringed upon Canadian civil liberties. This cannot be allowed to be repeated when so many parents are asking us to help them hold dangerous digital platforms and addictive social media companies to account.

● (1720)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would go back to the comments I put on the record in seeing the bill. In my mind, there is no doubt whatsoever that the vast majority understand that there are harmful things on the Internet that have an impact on children under the age of 16. We have had endless examples provided to the House.

To me there is a responsibility to not only put something into legislation, but also ensure that the legislation has some form of enforcement, that the commission being proposed would ensure there are consequences and that regulations are put in to protect our children.

Does the member support the principle of protecting our children through legislation and having a commission?

● (1725)

Helena Konanz: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's passion for this. I know how important it is to him that this bill passes, that this bill goes through and becomes legislation, but he must also understand that, if we do not do this right, it is not just something we can do a redo on. There are children's lives at stake here. There are families' lives at stake. We need to do this right, which means we need to bring it under careful scrutiny, and we need to make sure this is brought under careful scrutiny in committee.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Mitis—Matapédia—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the issue of jurisdiction absolutely must be addressed in the bill. Matters relating to social protection and the protection of youth fall under Quebec and provincial jurisdiction.

I would like to ask my colleague whether she agrees that the federal government should work in collaboration with Quebec and the provinces. Once the bill is passed, they are the ones who will be responsible for intervening directly in an area that does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Government of Canada.

[*English*]

Helena Konanz: Mr. Speaker, I think everyone in the House knows that this could be one of the most important bills during our mandate that could affect the most people, in particular children and families. Yes, we need to get input from all provinces, including Quebec. We need to get input from parents. We need to get input from children. We need to look at what other countries have done, because we are not the first to approach this situation. We need to make sure we learn from past mistakes, from countries like Australia, to learn from them and, again, make sure this legislation is done right for the sake of our children.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate the response I got from the member, but I really want to talk about the principle of having the commission, because the commission, from my perspective, is what gives it real teeth. We are talking about three to five members who would sit on a commission and ultimately be responsible for administering regulations. They would have the power, for example, to give fines. They would have the power to hold some of these Internet service providers responsible through regulation. They would have the authority necessary to protect the interests of our children and protect them from harmful content.

Is that something she supports in principle?

Helena Konanz: Mr. Speaker, we need to have commissioners. We need to have oversight, but we cannot take oversight away from parents. We need to make sure parents keep their oversight over their own children. If there is one commissioner who is making the decision, it can be problematic, so we need to make sure there is a lot of oversight, not only from the House, but also from parents themselves.

Harb Gill (Windsor West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a concern about this bill. Why are so many actual issues in this bill being left to regulations, rather than us deciding at this point in Parliament, as representatives of the people, that these are the minimum requirements? Why are we not doing that, and instead leaving it for regulations?

Helena Konanz: Mr. Speaker, my colleague also knows how important this bill is and how important it is that it is scrutinized. In particular, we need to make sure that what he is asking is discussed in committee and that something like this is not just pushed through quickly, like many other bills that have been brought forward by the Liberals have been. I believe they have the children of Canada at heart in this bill, but there is no way this can go forward without being heavily scrutinized in committee by everyone in the House.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

PROTECTING YOUNG PERSONS FROM EXPOSURE TO PORNOGRAPHY ACT

The House resumed from September 24 consideration of the motion that Bill S-209, An Act to restrict young persons' online access to pornographic material, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Listuguj, BQ): Mr. Speaker, what purpose do the laws we pass here serve? They serve to civilize society. That is what I have always loved about the law and the body of legislation built over time. Obviously, when new sectors emerge, the law often lags a little behind. The government has to catch up and figure out what is happening.

With the development of digital and virtual technology, we have work to do as legislators. Last week, one of the topics we discussed was the digital services tax. A little while ago, we discussed Bill C-34, which also seeks to regulate the social media sector. Now, we are now discussing Bill S-209, which is a worthwhile bill. The Bloc Québécois supports it, because what is happening online should be regulated more.

More and more people are living their lives online. The online world is increasingly becoming the place where people communicate, interact, meet and learn. It is crazy. I was looking at some statistics earlier. Young people spend more than three hours a day online. The law must adapt. One of the risks children face online is coming across pornographic material, and we know that exposure to such material can have damaging effects on their healthy sexual development. Bill S-209 seeks address that issue. That is why we support it.

I want to say from the outset that the Association des pédiatres du Québec also supports this bill and believes that this initiative must be commended. I think that this bill will transcend party lines.

Now that information technology makes pornographic content more widely available, the government has a duty to restrict minors' access to such material as much as possible. Bill S-209 makes it an offence for organizations to make pornographic material available to young persons on the Internet. Furthermore, it enables a designated enforcement authority to take steps to prevent pornographic material from being made available to young persons on the Internet in Canada. This bill is motivated by a desire to better regulate online access to pornographic material through age verification, which is currently limited to a mere declaration. In fact, that is the main purpose of this bill.

We should commend Senator Miville-Dechêne for laying the groundwork in Bill S-203, which is moving forward under a new name.

The bill does not answer every question, but it sets forth the general principles of verifying the age of customers seeking access to pornographic content. Once enacted, the bill will authorize the relevant authority to make regulations establishing a specific framework to be implemented. The bill also sets out the consequences for pornographic websites that violate the law, whether or not they are hosted in Canada. People may be wondering whether we can still civilize the virtual world when everything is hosted overseas. The answer is yes, we can still take action within our own borders.

The bill allows the government to block sites that fail to comply with the future age verification regulations. Is this a silver bullet that will ensure no child ever gains access to pornographic content? Probably not. There will always be ways to circumvent age verification measures, whether through VPNs or other workarounds. Nonetheless, we believe the bill will have beneficial effects because it will make access more difficult and, ultimately, protect children.

● (1735)

In our view, supporting Bill S-209 is common sense. It means standing up for measures designed to protect the public and promote healthy lifestyle choices. This bill addresses a real concern in our communities. That is why we will support this bill and recommend that it pass second reading.

[*English*]

Jeremy Patzer (Swift Current—Grasslands—Kindersley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to rise on behalf of the great people of southwest Saskatchewan.

I want to thank my colleague from just north of me in the province, the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, for sponsoring this Senate bill to address the issue of kids accessing pornography online. As a father of three, including two teenagers, I appreciate seeing all the good work she has done over the years to support children and families. She lives with the modern reality facing parents because she is a mother of young children herself. Raising children who are minors is something each of us has in common with many others in the House, from all parties. That is the most important thing we should be focusing on here today.

As parents, we want the best for our kids. We try to give them everything they need to have their best start in life. Our goal is to help them become adults who can reach their full potential for health, happiness, success and good character. While they are in the process of growing up, we want to keep them away from anything that is harmful to their development. It is an important part of our job to protect them when they are most vulnerable and too young to fully understand how certain things can negatively affect them and sometimes have a permanent impact, for life. As children enter their teen years, parents have to guide them through new challenges, including relationships and sexual development.

I'll quickly quote something from a book called *Every Young Man's Battle*, which is written from a faith-based perspective to help teens think about these issues. The authors say to the young reader, “One of the most difficult assignments you’ll ever have is to integrate your sexuality with the emotional, spiritual, social, and relational person you want to be.” They goes on to talk about having a healthy outlook on sexuality, which is integrated and balanced with other parts of our lives, including our emotional, relational and spiritual needs. This is a special part of how we are made. We know it is supposed to be a beautiful expression of love, which should lead us toward personal fulfillment, but instead of following that type of path, pornography easily takes a young person in the opposite direction and quickly creates some distorted impressions.

Especially during early puberty, or even before it begins, the damage of exposure to pornography can cause serious problems. One of those problems that can develop at a more formative time is addiction. As time goes on, now with more than one generation growing up with online pornography, we hear from professional and popular discussions about things like porn addiction and sex addiction. Like other forms of addiction, it has negative effects on the person experiencing it, but there are also ways for other people to be harmed, not only relationally but physically as well. That is why Bill S-209 starts off by saying that its purpose is to protect public health and public safety. To do that, it would bring forward a simple solution by requiring age verification. This is really nothing new. The law already has an age limit of 18 years old for selling or distributing sexually explicit material.

We do not allow minors to access these things at a physical store in the real world, and having this rule in place has helped to achieve some good in the process. In some ways, it is similar to the idea of setting an age for people to buy alcohol, but everybody knows that in practice, the situation is very different when it comes to the Internet. The Canadian Centre for Child Protection has said that children as young as eight and nine years old can easily come across sexually graphic material online. In Alberta, a separate study of adolescents found that one-third had been exposed to pornography by the age of 10. There are people who will simply say that this is just boys being boys, and their curious minds will find this material regardless, but many people's experience, and a huge amount of research, shows that it is a bigger problem than that, and I am going to explain why.

The human brain is growing and not finished developing until the age of 26 or thereabouts. To put it simply, while a person's brain is being wired and developing until they are 26, everything that happens in those first 26 years of their life goes a long way to determining who they are, because it can make a difference in how they develop at the biological level. Along with the psychological effects on mental health, we are also talking about experiences that can result in physical changes in the brain while it is still in the middle of development.

Viewing pornography is obviously very different from having sex with a real person. Besides the direct experience, there is something different happening with the brain. Studies have shown that people who are addicted to pornography have a similar brain pattern to people who are addicted to cocaine. Now, take that brain pattern and place it in a preteen or teenage boy or girl, and we have a recipe for disaster. It creates an addiction and a dependency that they will continue to seek from now on, and this is happening at a crucial stage when they are forming their self-image or dealing with insecurities. At the same time, they are learning new ways to handle relationships with their peers and having their first experiences, which shape how they will handle intimate relationships when they are older.

● (1740)

Here are some more stats. When intentionality is questioned, 44% of teens say they looked it up on purpose, but as many as 58% say they encountered porn accidentally. The rates of intentional consumption are actually higher among respondents who identify as LGBT. For that group, some studies show it was 50% higher or could even be 66% higher. We have these youth, who are already vulnerable and seeking affirmation for who they are, exposed to sexually explicit, graphic and violent material while working through deeply personal questions of identity. That higher rate of consumption actually puts them at even more risk than their peers of being victimized.

Pornography also creates erratic behaviour and false expectations of what sex is. I am going to give a couple of examples of such behaviour, and what I am about to say is quite disturbing. There was a case of a 12-year-old schoolboy who raped his seven-year-old sister after watching hard-core porn with his buddies on an Xbox. After viewing this content, he wanted to try to do the things in real life that he was watching online. There was another instance in 2019 of a 14-year-old boy sexually assaulting his eight-year-old stepsister after watching pornography on a regular basis. These are both very shocking and disturbing cases, and it is a mistake to dismiss them as a couple of isolated incidents. They are alarm bells for a much larger problem. Stories like this are less surprising if we realize what is happening beneath the surface.

When studies on this issue have been done, they have found that 38% of teens reported viewing porn that depicts rape, choking or deliberately causing someone pain; 21% agreed that “most people” like to be spanked, hit or slapped during sex; and the numbers get worse among those who purposely watch violent pornography. Those numbers skyrocket to 80% for teenagers who watch porn at least three times a week, yet only 30% say that some form of consent was given by the people in the videos.

Pornography is destroying how healthy relationships are viewed. It is creating massively false expectations for intimate partners about what is deemed to be normal conduct in the bedroom. This is something that is hard to overcome. We could ask any cocaine addict how hard it is to overcome that addiction and then imagine what it is like dealing with this addiction. When we have expectations and ideas being influenced by violent pornography, it is not difficult to imagine how this can contribute to abusive relationships or domestic violence.

All of this is why I support Bill S-209 to restrict access to pornography for young people. We can take action and require age verification. We can help to prevent and reduce early exposure among the future generations. We can take a simple step to fight some of the worst impacts of online pornography. It is impossible for government to replace the role of parents, and it should never try to do that, but it is also true that parents are looking for help to protect their kids online, and the government knows that. It says as much when it promotes Bill C-34 to restrict access to social media. I find it interesting that we are debating both of these bills at the same time. Hopefully, it helps my colleagues on the government side understand where this bill is coming from and support this one as well.

There are real concerns with young people using social media, which I share as a parent, but it is also likely that the negative effects of online pornography are even substantially worse, yet Bill C-34 would do nothing to address an issue of protecting the innocence of kids and youth from material that they should never see. Parenting has always been a tough job, but it has only gotten more complicated in a digital world. The least we can do for them is to pass Bill S-209.

[*Translation*]

Louis Villeneuve (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill S-209 on an issue that affects us all: our children's safety online.

A week ago, I welcomed my 17-year-old nephew, Charles André, to the Hill. He wanted to deliver a message to the Minister of Health and the Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture. He came to talk about how he became addicted to porn at the age of 10 and suffered psychological and physical harm as a result. Fortunately, my nephew has a strong support network and managed to break free from this vicious cycle. However, he wanted to make sure that our government puts measures in place to protect children.

I want to commend him for his leadership and courage in speaking out publicly about his experience. The post about his meeting with the ministers went viral, and he had to deal with a lot of hateful and violent comments, which is another problem that comes with social media. However, he also received a lot of kind comments. Young people, mothers and fathers expressed their support for Charles André's call for action, which strikes me as a clear message that people want to see the government take the necessary measures to protect our young people.

Children across Canada use online services every day to learn, to express themselves and to connect with their friends, their family and their community. However, these services can also expose children to inappropriate and harmful content and interactions. These harms are very real. They can harm young people's mental health, their development and their understanding of what healthy, respectful relationships look like.

Too many children are exposed to measurable and preventable harms online, and our laws have not kept pace. Pornography is a big part of that challenge. Children are exposed to it, whether they are looking for it or not, including on services that many of them use every day, such as social media. All too often, it only takes a few clicks, without any verifications, for a child to access such content. Parliament is right to examine how we can reduce that exposure. Protecting children from such harm is a responsibility we all share, across party lines.

I would like to acknowledge the work of Senator Julie Miville-Dechêne, who brought this issue to Parliament's attention through Bill S-209, as well as the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, who is sponsoring it in the House. This bill reflects a legitimate and widely shared concern that children should not have unrestricted access to online pornography. Let me be clear. Our government fully supports the principle underlying this bill, which is the protection of children. That is why I am pleased to confirm today that the government will support sending Bill S-209 to committee for study.

This bill is closely aligned with the work we are undertaking through Bill C-34, the safe social media act, but that alignment is not an obstacle. On the contrary, it is exactly why we should move forward with Bill S-209. Bill C-34 is based on a simple premise: A child's online experience is shaped by the content they see, by the way these platforms are designed and by the interactions these platforms enable. These risks rarely exist in isolation. The content, the design and the interactions can combine to amplify the effects on children. That is why Bill C-34 proposes comprehensive measures to make online services safer from the design stage onwards. Furthermore, together with Bill C-36, it establishes a new framework to better protect Canadians online.

Rather than relying on voluntary commitments from platforms, our government is proposing to enshrine clear legal responsibilities for operators of regulated social media services and AI chatbot services.

Their duties would be brought together under a single framework based on transparency, accountability and independent regulatory oversight. Operators would have a duty to act responsibly by assessing and mitigating risks associated with harmful content. They would have a duty to protect children by incorporating age restrictions into the design of their services. They would have a duty to make content that sexually victimizes a child as well as intimate content communicated without consent, including deepfake sexual images, inaccessible within 24 hours. The bill would also prevent children under the age of 16 from opening accounts on regulated social media platforms unless those services can demonstrate that they are safe for them.

● (1745)

As for chatbots, they will be required to direct users to support services when users express thoughts of suicide or self-harm. One important point is that Bill C-34 directly addresses children's exposure to pornographic content. Under this bill, if the operator of a regulated service has reasonable grounds to suspect that its service is making pornographic content accessible, it would be required to implement age verification or age estimation measures. These measures should be sufficient to mitigate the risk that children will be exposed to pornographic content on the service in question. This requirement is also part of the broader duty to protect children set forth in the bill.

The bill also provides clear safeguards by establishing a framework for these measures. Among other requirements, the regulator would be required to ensure that the measures are effective. Personal information could be collected or used only for age verification or age estimation purposes. It would have to be protected while it is being retained and then destroyed once the verification or estimation is completed. These requirements are set forth directly in Bill C-34. They are intended to ensure that the measures designed to protect children also respect privacy. To ensure that these protections are effective, the bill also provides for ongoing independent oversight. It recognizes that protecting young people online requires binding rules and a regulator capable of enforcing them.

Bill C-36 would create the digital safety and data protection commission of Canada, an independent, permanent regulatory body made up of members with proven expertise. For the first time, the major online platforms would be accountable to a Canadian regulator with real power. The commission would be able to conduct audits and inspections, issue compliance orders and impose administrative monetary penalties of up to $10 million or 3% of an operator's gross global revenue, whichever is higher. It would review the digital safety plans that operators would be required to publish to explain how they are identifying and mitigating risks on their services. It could also make regulations to issue guidelines. The commission would offer support to victims of online harm. It would also serve as a recourse for users who are dissatisfied with a platform's response to more serious content. It would operate independently. Platforms would no longer be able to get by on mere promises. They would have to demonstrate convincing results.

Bill S-209 and Bill C-34 are both grounded in a well-established principle: Children deserve to be protected, including online. Both bills recognize the importance of protecting children from being exposed to online pornography. This common objective presents an opportunity for us to consider how these two approaches can complement one another and strengthen our efforts to protect children online. That is why our government supports sending Bill S-209 to committee for study. Our commitment to protecting children is clear. The committee is the appropriate forum to examine Bill S-209 alongside the new framework proposed in Bills C-34 and C-36 and to ensure that these initiatives work together toward the shared goal of creating a safer online environment for children and families across Canada.

By protecting our children, we are protecting Canada's future. The experiences young people have online today will help shape the citizens, workers, innovators and leaders they become tomorrow. We have a responsibility toward them and toward Canada's future.

● (1750)

[*English*]

Eric Melillo (Kenora—Kiiwetinoong, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand today in support of Bill S-209. I certainly want to thank the members of the other chamber, who have worked hard to get the bill this far. I also want to thank the member for Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake for her leadership in keeping this bill going and bringing it to our chamber. It has been discussed for quite some time in Ottawa, and I am pleased to see that it is moving forward.

Very simply, Bill S-209 is about protecting Canadian children. I am certainly in no position to speak for all members of the chamber, or even all members of my party, although I am sure all members of this place would agree that children must be protected from harm and that parents should have the tools they need to protect their children online. Bill S-209 would protect children by requiring commercial pornographic websites to implement effective age verification or age estimation measures while including safeguards that protect Canadians' privacy. I believe this is truly a targeted, common-sense approach requiring websites that host pornographic material to take reasonable steps in verifying or estimating their users' ages.

Before I get further into some of the specifics of what the bill would do and how it aims to achieve its objectives, I want to speak about the “why”: the issue the bill aims to address.

We have heard some quite remarkable comments already from members on all sides about some of the challenges we are facing as a country regarding this issue. Research has associated minors' exposure to pornography with harmful attitudes and beliefs regarding sexual consent, including those of violence and degradation toward women, in particular, as well as coercion and exploitation. We also know that early exposure to pornography has been found to lead to increased rates of peer-to-peer sexual abuse among youth, meaning in part that a lot of the problematic narratives and actions depicted in some of this content are leading to many youth having troubles in their relationships, especially as they begin to grow older and begin dating.

There have been many studies about the impact that the exposure of youth to pornography has on their self-esteem. I would like to speak about that for a few moments.

Studies note that pornography consumption is associated with a negative body image and self-comparison in both sexes. Research links porn consumption to feelings of anxiety and depression in young girls, which is an alarming statistic to read. When looking at the impact on young boys, a report from Australia notes that viewing pornography can create or exacerbate feelings of loneliness, anxiety and body dissatisfaction in young boys in particular.

With all that knowledge being stated, there are also surveys that show that by the age of 16, over 70% of boys view pornography multiple times per week. If we put that into perspective, to step back and look at that alarming stat, we see that 70% of boys up to 16 not only have viewed some of this harmful content, but are regularly viewing content that can cause them to feel lonely, anxious and dissatisfied within their own bodies. This is unquestionably a great concern for the mental health of young girls and boys alike, and something that we should all be concerned about in this place.

The concerns that I highlighted and just shared are among the reasons that pornographic material is subject to age restrictions in Canada. However, despite the extensive research proving how harmful the material can be to young people, there is no effective enforcement of these age restrictions. This leads to the reality that many underage children are accessing pornography.

In fact, the average age of first exposure to pornographic material is 12 years old, with one-third of children exposed to pornographic material by the age of just 10. Further, for youth aged 14 to 18, there are studies showing that more than 70% report having viewed pornography. The fact that so many young Canadians are viewing content that, as I just highlighted, negatively impacts their mental health, their relationships, the way they view the world and the way they view their relationships should be of great concern to all of us.

● (1755)

Again, I do not speak for all members, but I am sure all members would agree with respect to having these age restrictions in place. That is the right thing to do. It only stands to reason that these restrictions should be enforced effectively. Of course, having a law in place but failing to enforce the law makes the law essentially useless. That would apply to any law we have in place in Canada. Bill S-209 seeks to fix that inconsistency. The bill, if passed, would require websites hosting pornographic material to implement effective age verification or age estimation systems. As I mentioned, the bill would also establish financial penalties for non-compliance, of up to $250,000 for a first offence and up to $500,000 for subsequent offences.

Further, Bill S-209 would give court authority to order Canadian Internet service providers to block access to non-compliant websites. The rules set out within Bill S-209 would apply equally to all sites accessible in Canada, including those based outside the country. I do understand that throughout discussion and debate on this, there have been some people who raised concerns about privacy and data collection, and I do not disregard those concerns.

I would note, however, that Bill S-209 also does not disregard those concerns. Set out in the bill are very specific criteria for age verification. Among others, the bill would require that the age verification method be operated by a third party organization, maintain user privacy, protect personal information and destroy any personal information collected once the age verification is completed. To me, this is a common-sense proposal being brought forward.

I think about the consistency of the laws we have in place. When Canadians purchase alcohol, tobacco, cannabis or lottery tickets, they must present valid ID at the discretion of the vendor. If we are to allow, as a Parliament and as a country, an entire industry that offers age-restricted materials to bypass that accountability simply because it exists online rather than in a brick-and-mortar storefront, to me that is nonsensical.

Further to that, it is presently an offence for a retailer and also for an individual employee to sell age-restricted products, such as alcohol and tobacco, to minors. This means that in Canada right now, we are essentially holding minimum-wage workers such as those selling tobacco products at a gas station, for example, to a higher standard of accountability than we are holding multi-million-dollar companies providing pornography online. It only stands to reason that all age-restricted products should have more consistent enforcement.

Companies that profit from providing pornographic content should be responsible for keeping it out of the reach of children, and the websites that fail to protect children should face serious consequences. That is why I support Bill S-209 and the goals set out within it. I believe this would be an important step in keeping kids safe and in ensuring that our laws are consistently enforced. I hope the House chooses to vote in favour of Bill S-209 and move it forward to the next stage of discussion.

As always, Conservatives will stand with parents and families and will continue to fight for an online environment where all children are safe.

● (1800)

Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill S-209, the protecting young persons from exposure to pornography act. I want to begin not only as a member of Parliament in the chamber but also from the perspective of a former educator and as a mom.

Before I entered politics, I spent almost two decades working with young people. I saw their potential, their curiosity and their struggles. Every day, I was reminded that the adults in a child's life have a responsibility to create conditions where they can learn, grow and thrive safely. Today that responsibility extends far beyond the classroom. It extends into a digital world that is available to our children 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That reality should concern us all.

In rising here today as a mom, like parents across the country, I have watched technology transform childhood. Many of us remember growing up in a world where childhood had limits, where certain materials were difficult to access and where adults acted as gatekeepers. Today a child can stumble across explicit and violent sexual content in a matter of seconds, and not because they were looking for it, not because parents have failed and not because teachers have failed but because the online world has been built in a way that makes that exposure possible, and where, instead, they are learning from an industry designed to generate profits. That should alarm every one of us.

As an educator, one of the most important lessons I tried to teach my students was the difference between reality and performance, yet when children encounter pornography at a young age, often before they are emotionally prepared to understand what they are seeing, that distinction becomes very blurred, as their expectations are shaped, their perceptions are shaped and their ideas about relationships are shaped. In some cases, those consequences can be quite profound. Our laws have not kept pace. Our Parliament is right to examine ways to reduce that exposure, because protecting kids from these harms is a responsibility we all share, regardless of party.

I want to take a moment to also thank Senator Miville-Dechêne for her work and service by keeping this issue before us here in Parliament, as well as my colleague from Saskatchewan, with whom I sat on HUMA, for her undying support in protecting children. I am happy to also be a seconder to the bill.

Our government is committed to keeping Canadians, especially children, safe, including online. We agree on the objective of preventing children from accessing online pornography. Bill S-209 shares this objective very closely and aligns with Bill C-34, the safe social media act. Let me be clear. Our government fully supports the principle behind the bill. Its alignment with Bill C-34 is not an obstacle. It is precisely why we support sending Bill S-209 to committee for study, as the bill asks the right questions and demands action to prevent children from accessing online pornography.

At its core, the bill would require commercial providers of online pornography to take concrete steps to restrict access by people under 18 years of age The status quo is not acceptable. Online services must take greater responsibility to protect children from being exposed to harmful content on their platforms. The remaining question is not whether action is needed but how to build a framework that works in practice, protects privacy, can be enforced effectively and remains responsive as technology changes.

Bill S-209 closely aligns with the work of our government that we are advancing through our safe social media act, Bill C-34, which would place an affirmative obligation on operators of regulated services. This would ensure that safeguards are put in place to mitigate the risk before children are exposed to harmful content, rather than after the situation has occurred. If an operator has reasonable grounds to suspect that its service makes pornographic content accessible, it would have to implement age verification or age estimation measures to mitigate the risk of children's being exposed to this content. Adequate protection is the first consideration.

● (1805)

The digital safety and data protection commission of Canada, an independent, permanent regulator that would be created through the safe social media act together with Bill C-36, would have to be satisfied that the measures implemented by an operator will meet that requirement. This is so essential, as the objective is not merely to demonstrate that an age assurance measure has been implemented. Its objective is to mitigate the risk that children will be exposed to pornographic content.

This approach recognizes that regulated services do not all operate in the same way, as their designs, users and methods of providing access to content might differ. Bill C-34 would establish the required outcome and assign responsibility for assessing the adequacy of the measure to the regulator with the necessary technical expertise to do so.

Second, Bill C-34 would also set clear limits on the collection and use of personal information for age assurance so that personal information could only be used to verify or estimate a person's age, and it would have to be protected and destroyed as soon as the process is complete. These safeguards are built directly into the safe social media act because protecting children should not create new privacy risks.

The digital safety and data protection commission of Canada would provide the continuing institutional capacity needed to apply this framework. As the body responsible for administering and enforcing that legislation, the commission would also assess the measures used by regulated operators and determine whether they satisfy the applicable requirements. This commission could establish guidelines concerning the protection of children in relation to regulated services. It could also make regulations specify design features that operators must integrate into regulated services as part of their duty to protect children.

While this authority also extends beyond age assurances, it demonstrates the central role that the commission would play in giving practical effect to the duty to protect our kids, much like our senator's bill. That continuing role is particularly important because age assurance technologies and industry practices will evolve. Different services might require different measures, and new evidence might identify more effective, privacy-protective approaches. The framework would therefore permit this flexibility and innovation without leaving adequacy entirely to the discretion of its regulators.

As we know, the Internet has created some extraordinary opportunities, but it has also created unprecedented access to harmful content. The question before us is whether we are willing to acknowledge that reality and then take action. As a former educator, I want young people to learn about relationships through respect, empathy and healthy human connection. As a mother, I want children protected during the years when they are most vulnerable. As a woman, I want girls growing up in a society that values their dignity, equality and humanity.

Those goals should be uniting all of us. This debate is not about politics. It is about children, families, the kind of culture that we are going to build for this next generation, and whether we are willing to say that the safety and well-being of our children matter more than a convenience of an online industry. I believe they do.

For those reasons, I am pleased to support Bill S-209 and these objectives of protecting young persons from exposure to pornography online.

● (1810)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I will give the floor to the hon. member for Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake for her five-minute right of reply.

Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, protecting children from harm should always be a priority. As legislators, we have the responsibility to protect the vulnerable and put reasonable safeguards in place.

I want to thank members from across party lines who have spoken in support of Bill S-209, which seeks to protect children from online pornography. Many members who have taken part in this debate are parents themselves. They understand the challenges of raising children in a digital age, when so much content is available at the click of a button.

Children are being exposed to pornography at very young ages. Sometimes they come across it accidentally. Other times, curiosity leads them to content they are not mature enough to understand. The concern is not just how young children are when they encounter this content, but what they may see. Age checks are often absent or ineffective on websites that host pornography. Children can encounter videos that portray aggression, degradation and sexual violence. Some depict acts that can cause serious physical harm, including choking, while presenting them as healthy or even desirable. Children's brains are still developing. They are learning to understand relationships, consent and appropriate behaviour. Repeated exposure to this content can shape how they understand sex, consent and expectations in relationships.

Parents have a very important role to play. They set boundaries. They have difficult conversations and use parental controls, but in reality, they cannot monitor every search, every link or every video. They should not have to carry this responsibility alone.

During this debate, the member for Vancouver Granville raised Bill C-34 as another way to address children's exposure to online pornography, but that is not correct. Bill C-34 does not have the same explicit reach as Bill S-209. Bill C-34 would require age verification to user-generated pornography on sites like OnlyFans. Just so members know, OnlyFans is a site where users generate pornography and upload it. However, Bill C-34 does not stipulate age verification for pornography websites. The government has provided Bill C-34 to the House, a bill that is supposed to protect children, but it does not cover pornography websites. The Liberal government has not clearly stated that it intends to use the powers in Bill C-34 to ensure that all commercial pornography websites restrict children's access.

If we agree that protecting children from online pornography is important, we cannot just leave it to Bill C-34. We need a direct approach, and that is what Bill S-209 is. It is a targeted approach that would require all commercial pornography websites to use prescribed age verification or age estimation methods to restrict children's access to it.

To be clear, Bill S-209 would not ban pornography for adults. It would establish an additional safeguard to help keep this adult content away from children. It also would not come at the expense of Canadians' privacy. This bill includes safeguards governing the collection, use and destruction of personal information used for age checks. We can protect children from content they are not ready to see while also protecting Canadians' personal information.

This issue has been before Parliament since 2016, when the House unanimously supported Motion No. 47, which called for a study on the public health effects of easy access to online sexually explicit material. This is the third version of this legislation being considered, yet children still lack these safeguards. Other jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom, France, Germany and more than 25 American states, have taken steps to restrict minors' access to online pornography.

We cannot keep debating this issue without taking action. Our children deserve safeguards, and I urge all members in the House to support Bill S-209.

● (1815)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The question is on the motion.

If a member participating in person wishes that the motion be carried or carried on division, or if a member of a recognized party participating in person wishes to request a recorded division, I would invite them to rise and indicate it to the Chair.

Rosemarie Falk: Mr. Speaker, I ask that it be carried on division.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): I declare the motion carried on division. Accordingly, the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

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

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

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I suspect that if you were to check, you would find unanimous consent to call it 6:30 p.m. so we can get on with government business.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-34, An Act to enact the Digital Safety Act and the Digital Safety Commission of Canada Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Karina Gould (Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-34 today. I will be sharing my time with the member for Winnipeg South Centre.

This bill is long overdue. This is not the first time this House has tried to legislate to protect children in particular from online harms, but hopefully this time we will get it done. Based on the speeches I have heard from colleagues across parties in the House, it seems like there is finally consensus to protect our children online.

When I was preparing for this speech last night, I stumbled across an article in the New York Times. It gave me pause and crystallized for me why it is so crucial that we put this legislation forward and get it right. The article was about a young woman living in the United States who had epilepsy and decided to talk about her medication with ChatGPT. What ended up happening is that ChatGPT counselled her on how to reduce her epilepsy medication and hide it from her doctor, which ultimately led to her death.

Bill C-34 deals with chatbots. It deals with AI. We need to ensure that there are protections in place. There are vulnerable people and children using these tools in a way that is harmful to them. This woman's story is an absolute tragedy and is something that I think all of us want to ensure does not happen again. What it crystallizes for me is that, left to their own devices, these companies cannot be trusted to regulate themselves.

We have only to look at the whistle-blowers from Meta, Frances Haugen and Arturo Béjar, who both testified in front of Congress in the United States and said that Facebook and Meta have knowingly not put forward safety mechanisms because they want increased profits. We have heard that when it comes to protecting children, there are studies at Meta showing that young women are particularly vulnerable when it comes to bullying, body image issues and eating disorders, yet consistently they choose profits over safety.

We have all heard stories from constituents and people across this country whose children have experienced online harms. Unfortunately, there are cases like that of Amanda Todd, who was so severely cyber-bullied that she ended up taking her own life. We have a responsibility to act in this House.

I had the opportunity to meet with her mom, Carol, who has met with many of us in this place over the years and has been asking all of us, as members of Parliament, to act responsibly. Bill C-34 would do just that. It is there to protect our children from online harms and would come forward with a digital safety commission that would make sure the big tech companies are putting in safety by design as their principle. It would have real teeth and a real ability to fine companies that do not uphold their obligations to protect our children.

If these things were happening in a playground, it would be unacceptable and the police would be called. There is no reason for these harms to be allowed online. The companies and people who perpetuate them need to be held to account.

What I like about the digital safety commission is that it is based on principles, values, laws and protecting our children, but it is flexible for the future. When I hear colleagues say that we need to write these laws right now, I challenge them on it: Do we know what those harms are going to be five, 10 or 15 years from now?

I am going to date myself a bit, because my first year of university was the first year that Facebook came out. In 2006, nobody knew that Facebook would become Meta. Nobody knew that Meta would effectively become the Internet in some parts of the world and have the kind of reach and control it does now.

● (1820)

We do not know what the next thing is going to be. We do not know exactly how ChatGPT, Claude or any of these AI companies are going to transform our experiences and what existing or new harms they could potentially cause. I am not saying there is nothing good about any of these things. There certainly are. There are ways people connect that are great, but we have an obligation as members of Parliament, as legislators, as citizens, some of us as parents, to make sure we are doing everything we can to protect our children, the children of this country and people in this country from those potential harms.

What would be good about the digital safety commission is that, for the first time, we would not just be legislating in the rear-view mirror; it would actually be forward-thinking and would give Canadians the tools to ensure that we can protect against some of these harms.

Bill C-34 would also impose an age limit when it comes to social media. In her testimony to Congress, Frances Haugen suggested that, in fact, platforms like Instagram should raise their minimum age from 13 to 16, or even to 18. I think this is a really good step. We know there are age limits for a number of things in this country, whether it is drinking, voting, driving, or being able to buy cigarettes or cannabis. There are always people who are going to get around those age limits, but that does not mean it is not the right thing to do. It gives parents the tools to also help protect their children.

A journal for the Canadian Medical Association talks about the fact that when children have constant access to online content, their levels of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation increase. Just reducing that from three hours a day to one hour a day has incredible benefits for their mental health. It is why the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Mental Health Association, organizations like Unplugged and Raise the Age, Children First Canada and a wide range of pediatricians, etc. support Bill C-34, as it is about providing opportunities for healthy and safe lives for our kids.

AI is changing the way in which we interact, just as social media has done over the past 20 years. We need to ensure that, as Canadians, we can take control of what is happening in the online world and have the tools to enforce protections for our children. This is important work that would build off legislation like Bill C-16, which already made it illegal to share content like deepfakes, revenge porn, etc. We need to make sure we are protecting everyone from an image that can go around the world in seconds.

As a mom of two young kids who are not quite at the age where they would be engaged in social media, I cannot say how much I want this to pass right now. I talk to young people who tell me about their anxiety, their depression, the challenges and the bullying. They cannot turn social media off. When I was younger, maybe some of these things existed in magazines and we had these kinds of images, but I could put that down. I could put that away, and I could walk outside. When we are connected all the time, there is no escape.

Bill C-34 would not solve all the problems. There are always going to be challenges, but this is such an important piece of legislation at this moment in time to do what we can to protect our children, protect future generations and make social media and the Internet a safer place for everyone.

● (1825)

Karim Bardeesy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague pointed to the flexibility around the digital safety commission. I wonder if she could expound on why it would be important for the digital safety commission to have the powers and the flexibility it needs to adapt to new and emerging technologies.

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, it is exactly as I said in my speech. We do not really know what is coming next. We did not predict 20 years ago so many of the harms we are seeing happen right now, and we do not have the laws in place to deal with them. If we are constantly trying to keep up with technology, we are always going to fall behind. Technology is always going to be ahead of what we are legislating, so having a digital safety commission would enable us to have the flexibility and the agility to respond, hopefully in real time, but if not, hopefully quickly enough to actually deal with these harms as they emerge.

[*Translation*]

Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I think that there is broad consensus around this bill and that it has unanimous support in the House. Nevertheless, some people have raised concerns about privacy, particularly when people are required to show ID to prove their age. I think those concerns are legitimate. We have to figure out how to strike the right balance between inconvenience and risk reduction.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on this specific risk. What are the best ways to reduce it?

● (1830)

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. I think we have the advantage of being able to learn from Australia's experience. We have introduced this bill, but we will also have the opportunity to observe what is happening elsewhere and make improvements.

Personally, I have some concerns about age verification technology. Showing a piece of ID is something we have to do in many everyday situations, but we do not do it online. I think we need to talk about it, but we also need to listen to the experts to ensure that privacy and personal information are protected.

Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the bill appears to put off 50 decisions until later. Of those 50 decisions, 19 will be delegated to a minister, and 31 will be referred to a commission that does not exist yet.

Given that this bill is so important and so eagerly awaited by Canadians, should we not ensure that these questions already have answers, rather than postponing them and relying on “maybes”, especially when it comes to something as important as protecting our young people online?

Hon. Karina Gould: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, there will always be factors that we cannot foresee, and I believe it is important to allow the commission to exercise its judgment. As I noted, 20 years ago, no one could have predicted what Meta would become. Likewise, we cannot know what platforms and technologies will look like in five, 10 or 20 years.

For that reason, I believe it is important to provide the commission with a degree of flexibility. That said, the principles and objectives that will guide its work have now been clearly established, and that is what matters most.

[*English*]

Ben Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to rise on behalf of those I represent in Winnipeg South Centre. I do want to begin by thanking my colleague from Burlington for an exceptional speech. She did a great job of providing a framework and a foundational conceptualization of what we are facing here and why this piece of legislation is so necessary.

I have talked often, when I have had the honour of rising in the House, about my time as a teacher. I started as a grade 6 French immersion educator at École Robert H. Smith. I can still remember at 3:30 on the first day of school putting my head down on the table and wondering how I was going to get through it. It turns out I did, and I had the privilege of going on from there to be a high school teacher and a high school principal. It was through about a decade in the public education system that I got to know what mattered to kids, what they were interested in, what they were curious about, what challenges they faced and their opportunities. Of course, by extension, I had the privilege of being able to work with so many of their families as well.

I stand here today as well, as a very proud uncle, not only to my own niece through blood, but to so many of my friends' children, many of whom are growing up now, in an age that looks very different than it did when my colleague from Burlington and I were young. That reality is one that is constantly shifting.

The nature of the threats faced in our society, particularly by young people, are more dynamic, they are more sophisticated, and they are more targeted and complicated than they were in the past. By virtue of changes in technology, and the emergence of social media and the strong role that it is playing in our society, we have had to re-evaluate the safeguards that we must put in place as a society to ensure that, while we have access to these incredible technologies that have the potential in so many ways to do good, we are aware of the harms that they can create and are creating.

I am mindful of an indigenous scholar named Dr. Martin Brokenleg, whom I studied a bit when I was the principal of a school called Maples Met in Winnipeg. The circle of courage is based on these four ideas of what is important in the lives of young people. They are focusing on mastery, generosity, independence and belonging. In relation to what we are talking about here, it is independence and belonging that are so critical in the frame of Bill C-34.

Young people want to belong, and at the same time, they want to be independent. Anyone who is around young people, particularly teenagers, will know that there comes a time when they no longer want mom or dad to drop them off at school in sight of kids, or a time when they want to be able to go to the mall alone with their friends, and they want to have that independence. However, there is a variety of different things out there in the online world in particular, that we ought to be mindful of when we are engaging with young people about that independence that they are seeking.

I can remember a superintendent of mine once telling the story of a fight that broke out in the school, and although in the early moments of the fight the kids were all cheering and doing what young teenagers often do when there is a physical altercation, which was ego and bravado taking place, when the principal finally did show up, the students asked what took them so long. In other words, it happens often with young people that, at the same time as they are holding our hand tightly to tell us to stay, they are pulling away from us.

This reminds me of the tension that exists in terms of the responsibilities that we have as adults and as lawmakers in our country to provide the guidance, support and love that is necessary for young people to grow and develop into independent young people, while at the same time ensuring that we are responsible for keeping them safe. This brings me to what we have heard in relation to some of the challenges that are ongoing right now vis-à-vis social media and online platforms.

I have received calls from countless parents, men and women, regardless of the demographic that they may represent socio-economically, who have called to say that they are scared for what their children are exposed to online, and that they expect the government is going to do something about it.

● (1835)

I have received calls from students, many of whom I have met with in the hallways, libraries and theatres of their schools, who have talked about their resistance to social media and to a variety of other online platforms that they feel are actually taking away from the authenticity of their lived experiences.

I have heard from experts. Just this past weekend in my office, I was really proud to welcome an expert panel of unbelievable community members to talk about the different challenges we face. I want to take the opportunity to give credit to Dr. Michelle Warren, a clinical psychologist who was there and who spoke about the work she does with young people in particular who are facing anxiety and depression by virtue of some of the harmful things they are exposed to online.

There was also Monique St. Germain, who represents the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, which is located in my riding and is something I am very proud of. It is a world leader in eradicating the distribution of illegal and damaging sexual images of children online. It is fully behind the government in terms of its support for the measures embedded in Bill C-34. I was also joined by Cordella Friesen, who serves as the head of the YMCA in Winnipeg. They work with young people on a daily basis and were there to share stories they have heard from folks who use their services. Sharon Labossiere, Colleen Nelson and Laura Thomas are each great educators in their own right who took time to tell us about what they are seeing in schools and who reinforced the need for us to act.

The question then becomes what we should do about this. We have heard the calls from parents, from young people and from experts that it is time for us to act. Bill C-34 would do this in a number of ways. One that has often been talked about in the context of this debate and outside the walls of the chamber has to do with placing limitations on social media.

I know that there have been some criticisms of other jurisdictions, most noteworthy being Australia, that have taken some steps in order to limit the harms that are being caused by too much time online, and that there have been some instances where young people are finding ways around them. I think my colleague, the member for Burlington, did an excellent job of explaining that notwithstanding those challenges, which of course will evolve over time, they cannot alone be the justification for why we do not start to move forward today. I think ensuring that there is less time spent on these platforms for people at vulnerable ages is going to be very important.

I will note that I come from a province that has put a policy in place to ban cellphone use in schools. I have heard overwhelmingly from teachers, principals, parents and young people that this has had a positive impact on their experience in school. I think there is something for us to take from that feedback and from those experiences in relation to Bill C-34.

Bill C-34 is also about accountability that would lead to real penalties and that will hold accountable in the way they ought to be held accountable those who are responsible for designing and maintaining unsafe platforms online, which is to say that we would create a regulator. Of course, through a regulatory framework and ongoing dialogue in the chamber and beyond, after the passage, I hope, of this legislation, we would figure out exactly how that would come to be.

The important piece is that there would be accountability. Social media platforms and other online platforms that care more about the bottom line than they do about the health, well-being and safety of our children would be held accountable. They would be held accountable not just through the proverbial slap on the wrist but through real financial and other lawful penalties that would send the very strong message that is necessary for them to understand we are serious.

I am very proud to be part of a government that is putting forward a bill that would address these serious concerns at a moment in time where it is incumbent upon us, as the Parliament of this wonderful country, to take action that will keep our young people safe.

● (1840)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Listuguj, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his contribution to the debate. My question is as follows: Before drafting Bill C-34, did the government carry out consultations, particularly with Quebec, which has already made significant progress on the issue of regulating access to social media for minors?

Ben Carr: Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely important bill. There have been conversations across Canada, of course, with parents, with groups representing children and mental health, as well as other stakeholders that have something to say in this context. I cannot speak to which discussions took place between governments, but I certainly know that conversations are ongoing between governments. The people on our side, in the Government of Canada, are developing the bill here and will continue their efforts with the regulations to follow.

[*English*]

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Winnipeg South Centre brings a very interesting point of view, given his background as an educator and working with young people for as long as he has.

It is important that this is not about replacing parents, or anything of this nature. It is something to support the current structure of parents and teachers. However, I believe the need for it, given how the Internet is, and the harmful content out there, is easily justified.

Can the member provide his thoughts on that from a teacher's perspective, possibly?

Ben Carr: Mr. Speaker, as I made reference to during my remarks, it is critically important we understand that young people need to go through experiences in life. It is very important, as they develop the skills for independence, that we allow opportunities for them to fall and to learn lessons, sometimes difficult ones, and then to get back up, but of course that has to be done with our love and support.

One of the things I noticed in the years I spent in the public education system is that as much as young people feel as though they are capable of moving through the world on their own, they recognize the importance of having that love, support and guidance from the adults in their life, inclusive of their parents of course, but also their teachers, friends and others. This bill is a really important step in the right direction of ensuring that we find the balance between allowing young people to participate in the world around them and making sure we do so in a safe way.

● (1845)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that give the legislation teeth is the proposed digital safety commission that would have the power to give fines and make sure the regulations are in fact being enforced in many different ways.

I am wondering if my colleague could provide his thoughts on the importance of having a commission, because it would actually provide action.

Ben Carr: Mr. Speaker, one thing the Province of Manitoba has done that I am fully supportive of is that it has created a body that can oversee disciplinary measures for educators. The person who heads that up goes by the name of Noni Classen. Where did she come from? She came from the Canadian Centre for Child Protection. The whole reason the disciplinary board exists is for there to be accountability and for there to be real consequences when inappropriate or unacceptable actions are taken.

I see this as no different. It is about protecting young people. However, if it is going to work, it has to be created in a way that ensures that there are consequences. I have full confidence, based on the way the legislation is currently written, and I am sure as the legislation will be strengthened throughout the legislative process, that we will land at a place that will ensure that if a social media company or other online platform is not abiding by the law, as it is written in Bill C-34, they would have a price to pay for that.

[*Translation*]

Gabriel Hardy (Montmorency—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am going to share my time with the member for Cambridge.

Every parent in Montmorency—Charlevoix and, I suspect, across all of Quebec and Canada has gone through the same experience. It is 10 p.m. and our teenager's bedroom door is closed. We see a faint blue light under the door. Sometimes we hear them laughing to themselves, or we hear strange noises from a video. When that happens, every parent starts wondering the same thing. What are they watching? Who are they talking to? We wonder how long they have been online. We also want to know who is on the other side of the screen. I think that is a completely reasonable question to ask.

Today, we have to be clear. Phones are not the enemy, but they come with problems and challenges that we have rarely encountered in our lifetimes. In fact, our generation may have no experience with that kind of thing at all, and the generation before us has even less. Few of us here have lived in the kind of world our children are growing up in. This is what Bill C-34 addresses.

We have to be clear from the outset. From the start, we have to be clear about the fact that protecting our children online is non-negotiable. It is not a partisan issue. We all agree on that, and so we should. However, we are not going to give the government carte blanche when it asks for powers in the name of protecting our children. More power for a good reason is how these things always start.

Our role as opposition members is to challenge the government, ask questions, seek out the little details hidden in the legislation and make them public knowledge. Two things can be true at once: We have to protect our young people, but we must not close our eyes and hand over unrestricted power. I think we understand that, and parents, of all people, understand that the best.

Why is this discussion important right now? It is because things are changing at a pace we have rarely seen before, and the numbers are really heading in the wrong direction. In 2024, the police reported 17,000 cases of online child sexual exploitation. That is four times as many as in 2014. In the span of a decade, there was an exponential increase. Behind each of these cases, there is a child, but there is also a parent who never saw it coming.

Let us read this bill the way a parent would read it, and I am going to talk about it the way a parent would, focusing on two questions. Will this really protect my children? For me, that is the first question I ask myself. We can certainly pass laws, but will they really protect children? The second question is this: Who will get to decide?

The most prominent provision in Bill C-34 is the proposal to prohibit young people under the age of 16 from having social media accounts. This is what has been highlighted in the media, namely that this is a major initiative to protect young people and that social media is being banned for those under 16. Many parents see this minimum age as the right age to regulate access. In fact, an Angus Reid poll found that three in four Canadians support the measure. That is 75% of the population.

However, the poll reveals another very important fact, and that is that 72% of Canadians believe that parents, not the government, are primarily responsible for what teenagers look at on social media and how they use those platforms. Canadians want both. They want something that protects their children, but they also want to have the final say at home. They want clear guidelines, but they want to remain in control.

Now let us look at what happened in Australia. My colleagues talked about this earlier today in the House. Australia banned social media for children under the age of 16. This happened last December, so it is a very recent thing. Three months later, Australia's own online safety regulator found that eight in 10 children were still using at least one platform that had been banned or age-restricted, and more than half of those who had kept their accounts said that no one had checked their age.

That does not mean that we should do away with this, but clearly we can look at what other places are doing, draw inspiration from their approach and try to improve on it. If we have a ban that does not work, that does not protect anyone. It just creates a false sense of security. That is what we need to stop doing. We need to stop making laws that only create more bureaucracy.

Then there are video games. If we ask a 10-year-old where they meet up with their friends after school, the answer is often online, playing a video game with a live chat feature. That is where the young people talk to one another. However, video game platforms are not covered by this bill. If we lock the door but leave the window open, are we really protecting young people?

My second question is one that requires us to really look at the details: Who gets to decide?

If we are going to prevent young people under 16 from accessing social media, we will need a way to verify everyone's age. That means asking everyone for proof of age: me, my grandmother, my grandfather, my parents. We will have to ask all of them how old they are. How exactly will that work? Will people be expected to upload their driver's licence and send it to companies they have never heard of? Will they have to submit to facial analysis software? This raises questions once again.

The bill does not provide the answers. Instead, it says regulations will be made later. We have not yet seen the regulations. What I just talked about is not an isolated example.

● (1850)

Under the bill, 50 major decisions will be put off until later, with 19 reserved for the minister responsible and 31 referred to a commission that does not exist yet.

Which platforms are covered by the ban? Cabinet will decide that. Moreover, the bill does not currently identify any criteria for that.

Which platforms could be exempt? The commission will decide that upon request.

The 24-hour deadline for taking down content can be changed by cabinet. That way, a minister can personally choose the time frame. We are told that the ban is temporary, but that is not indicated anywhere in the bill.

This commission would draft rules, conduct investigations, hold hearings and impose fines. That is absolute power, and it is not bound by any rule of evidence. Once again, it is total control. This is the kind of detail that is important to raise in bills that have a nice catchy title.

Until the other members are appointed, the chair of the commission will make all decisions on their own. Again, there is a problem here.

That is not all. Five days after introducing Bill C-34, the government introduced Bill C-36, which makes that same commission a super-regulator of personal data, taking that power away from the Privacy Commissioner. Oops. The privacy protection being sold to us in Bill C-34 is already changing hands in Bill C-36. This is the kind of detail that deserves to be pointed out in the House, but it does not come up in the speeches touting the bill's virtues. These details are never mentioned in the big announcements, but they really change things.

My questions are not meant to be partisan. I am not saying that this is the Conservative perspective. Other people have raised these same questions. Exactly what powers will the new commission have? That is important to know.

When a government asks for more powers in the name of protecting our children, we have every right to read each line of its proposal twice and to ensure the intent really is to protect our children. In this case, I believe the Liberal government has a questionable track record.

Now, to be honest, some things in this bill are good. Because I can see the good, I feel entitled to say that I see other things that are not good at all.

The bill addresses deepfakes, fake intimate images generated by artificial intelligence. This is something we really do need to take action on.

It forces the platforms to identify AI content. Again, that is very good.

It does not touch private messaging. That is good.

It requires chatbots to intervene when a person is in crisis. That is a must.

In her speech, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister said that infinite scroll is a design choice. She was right.

The platforms have the ability to make better choices. I think it is up to us to steer them in that direction. Bill C-34 has that to its credit.

Ultimately, this is not about platforms or commissions. It is about families. People do not need a commissioner to make decisions for them. Our families, our parents, need tools. They need information. Above all, they need to have the final say. Parents must continue to be responsible for their children. The final decision cannot always be made in an office in Ottawa like the Liberals do. On the contrary, the final decision must be made at kitchen tables in the homes of families in Quebec and Canada.

What should we be looking at and working on in committee? I think that is what all parents want to see us do. First, we want to put parents first. We need to work on simple tools and safer default settings. We need to give parents the final say. That is what we should be working on. Second, Parliament is the one that sets the rules. How age is verified and how long the ban lasts are things that should be included in the act, not in regulations that will be voted on later. Third, we need a commission with checks and balances. We want clear limits, transparency and a right of appeal. Fourth, we need to protect our children where they actually are: video games, chatbots and app stores.

Our position can be summed up in a few words. We say “yes” to protecting children. That is obvious. We say “no” to placing blind trust in the government. We say “yes” to platforms that are accountable. We say “no” to a commission that is accountable to no one. We say “yes” to security. We say “no” to mass surveillance. We say “yes” to a government that supports parents. We say “no” to a government that wants to take their place.

It is important that this bill be referred to committee. We need to hear from parents, doctors, police officers and experts. We need to hear from our young people. We need to be able to invite them before the committee and ask them about their experiences, because that is important.

We must get this bill right. Our children deserve a bill that will work for them, and our parents deserve to be trusted.

● (1855)

Steeve Lavoie (Beauport—Limoilou, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is an important topic we are discussing today.

I am a parent myself. I understand that we may sometimes disagree.

In his recommendations, my colleague said that we should look after the parents first. I would say that we need to look after the children first. I have four children. My first was born when I was 20 years old, but the rules were not the same 31 years ago. I look at my son, who is 31 years old today and has three children of his own. When I see social media, I wonder what I would have done 31 years ago. Often, I see that parents need help. My colleague mentioned two polls. One was about parents and the other was about the government. I would argue that they were about both.

Does my colleague not agree that parents need the government's support in setting appropriate rules in order to help them do the best they can?

Gabriel Hardy: Mr. Speaker, that is such a good question that I already answered it in my speech.

When I say that children must be the priority in this bill, I mean it. We are doing all this for them. I also pointed out that, according to the Angus Reid poll, 75% of people agree that legislation should be passed to protect our children online, but 72% of people, so roughly the same number, said they want to retain control.

We agree with that. We need to give parents the tools to better understand the reality young people are facing. We cannot ask young people what they want, because they are the ones we are trying to protect. We need to ensure that our young people, who are at the heart of our decisions, are protected and that parents have the tools they need to exercise vigilant, effective and judicious supervision in line with the current situation.

Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent—Akiawenhrahk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by saying how much I appreciated the remarks made by my colleague from Montmorency—Charlevoix earlier in his speech. He touched on an important social challenge that concerns all of us. I have always said that we enter politics because of our parents and that we serve because of our children. The member captured the issue particularly well when he described teenagers coming home at 10 o'clock at night and heading straight to their rooms. Parents can see the light under the door, but they do not really know what is happening on the other side. I am no longer at the stage of life where I am raising children, but I am the grandfather of two little girls, aged four and six. I can honestly say that, throughout this debate, I have been thinking about them.

What advice would my colleague offer the government on how to better equip parents to deal with the challenges posed by social media in the 21st century?

● (1900)

Gabriel Hardy: Mr. Speaker, it is the new reality. Four-, six-, seven- or eight-year-old children are sometimes more adept with electronics than adults. Sometimes parents and grandparents do not know how to help young people. It is not about controlling them. It is about helping them. The child does not know that he or she is going down a road that is going to hurt them in the long run, that will put their mental health at risk. It is up to us to take responsibility for them.

How do we do that? We do it by equipping parents, by having informed parents, by keeping parents in the equation, not taking parents out of the equation by saying that the government will make the decisions. We see that here all the time. The Liberals rise in the House and say how proud they are to intervene in everything and that more and more people need Liberal subsidies to get by.

We want people to be free to make their own choices. It is important for parents to have access to information so they can make the right decisions for their children.

Steeve Lavoie: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. I think that we are all here for the right reasons. We are all facing the same challenges. I also agree on the issue of how we can help parents. My colleague mentioned tools earlier. I would like him to elaborate on that.

We have been talking non-stop this evening. Does my colleague have any specific ideas that could be effective and that could really help parents right away?

Gabriel Hardy: Mr. Speaker, once again, I do not think that it is up to me, as some great thinker, to start telling people what they should do.

I think that is what committees are for. We can bring in experts and make sure we listen to them. At the end of the day, it is not ideology that is important. It is results and what ordinary people are facing.

What should we do? We can set up a committee, invite experts, listen to what they have to say, present ideas to them and ask what they think about the tools. We can talk to digital platforms, talk to our young people about how they actually use the Internet and work together to develop a law that helps them.

[*English*]

Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no security system is judged by its strongest lock, but instead by how easily someone gets through its weakest point. The same idea applies to Bill C-34. We need to discuss whether its proposed measures for a safer Internet would actually work when children and platforms test them.

I share the goal of the bill before us. The most important thing is to protect our children. Parents cannot take on some of the largest technology companies in the world by themselves. Parliament has a responsibility to ensure those companies are held accountable for the risks their products create for children and families. However, good intentions alone are not enough. The question before us is whether the mechanisms in the bill would deliver the protections families are expecting.

I have heard from so many parents in Cambridge and North Dumfries who are being asked to protect their children against some of the most sophisticated companies on earth. They want peace of mind. They want to ensure privacy and security for their kids. Most of all, they want them to be safe, but we have to ask: Will the law promising these things actually work when it meets a 14-year-old with a phone or a trillion-dollar, multinational social media giant?

Parliament is being asked to approve the framework today, while many of the important details that would actually protect our children are to be determined later. Under Bill C-34, regulated social media platforms would have to stop children under 16 from holding accounts, but a platform can apply to the new commission for an exemption by showing it has adequate safeguards. What constitutes adequate? Parliament does not know, because that standard has not yet been established. The bill does not name a single platform. Whether it covers TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, Roblox or Discord will be decided by cabinet after Parliament has voted. Law professor Michael Geist counted 50 key decisions in the bill left to cabinet and a commission that does not yet exist. That makes careful scrutiny of the bill even more important.

There are other lessons from around the world we could take to inform our conversation here today. For instance, Australia's under-16 ban took effect on December 10, 2025, across 10 major platforms. Four months in, surveys found many Australian children who had accounts before the ban still retained access. Most of those who stayed reported that getting around the restrictions was easy. A larger study found that account use among children fell after the ban took effect, but significant numbers remained on the very platforms the law was written to keep them off. For most of those children, staying on took no effort at all. Many reported that existing accounts were never removed, while others got through age checks, created new accounts or relied on someone else to set one up for them.

The regulator found platforms letting new users simply declare they were 16 or older, and allowing children to retry the same age check until they were eventually let through. One app was reported to allow 24 attempts a day. Some teens beat the face scans by drawing on facial hair. When accounts did close, children moved. Many reported spending more time on gaming platforms and messaging apps, and some said they felt less safe online than before. Apps left outside the ban, like WhatsApp, surged in popularity. One Australian research compared the regulator's job to a game of whack-a-mole, chasing each new app after children had already found it.

Gaming is one of the areas of greatest concern. Roblox and Discord were not among the services covered by Australia's initial ban, yet they offer friend lists, private chats, voice channels, group servers and strangers who can reach a child directly. Roblox now uses age-based controls to limit who can communicate with whom, but neither platform was required to keep a 14-year-old off the service entirely. Indonesia and Malaysia saw the same risk and included Roblox inside their bans.

If gaming and messaging services fall outside the bill's scope, children will simply do their socializing there instead. Platforms usually decide which country's law applies based on the Internet address the phone connects through and a VPN routes that connection through a server somewhere else. A teenager in Cambridge can appear to be in Kentucky, Kenya or Korea, all places where Canadian law does not reach. Many free VPNs make their money by collecting and selling what their users do online, and so a child using one may be handing their browsing history to a company nobody can identify. Australia's regulator now expects platforms to try to stop under-sixteens from using VPNs, but new servers appear faster than old ones can be blocked, which is another game of whack-a-mole.

● (1905)

Here is another weak point. Facial age estimation is quick and inexpensive, but even one of the industry's leading providers reports an average error of approximately one year for teenagers, yet this bill draws a hard line at a single birthday. An error of a year in either direction lets some 15-year-olds through and locks out some 17-year-olds, and children have already shown they will keep trying until the camera says yes.

Government ID is more accurate, but it means handing a child's identity to a private company, and that information is valuable to criminals and hostile foreign actors alike. To its credit, this bill says that information can only be used for age checks and must be destroyed once the check is done, but a rule on paper is not the same as a secure system. Every database containing sensitive information will eventually become a target. Just last month, IDScan.net confirmed a breach involving more than 150 million drivers' licences and identity records. The challenge is only growing as AI accelerates the discovery of software vulnerabilities and the speed at which attackers can exploit them.

Before coming to this House, I worked in systems architecture and database management. One thing this experience taught me is that data scheduled for deletion is still data until the moment it is actually deleted. Every additional database creates another target, another vulnerability and another risk that must be managed. Canadians need to know who will hold that information, where it will be stored, who owns the companies holding it, how long it will be retained and whether Canadians will be notified if a breach occurs.

There is also a gap that no age check closes because the bill restricts holding an account, not viewing content. The government's own charter statement confirms that young people would still be able to browse without an account. A child without an account can often still watch videos and scroll public feeds while logged out, where none of the teen safety settings or parental controls apply.

Parents are still the first line of defence for their children online. The question for Parliament is whether this bill gives parents meaningful tools to help protect their children or whether those tools and safeguards are more effective on paper than in real life.

Many countries are still adjusting their own approaches. France's constitutional council struck down the country's proposed social media ban before it could take effect, citing concerns about privacy safeguards and freedom of expression. All around the world, governments are trying to answer many of the same questions that Parliament is grappling with today.

Australia has also had to go back and strengthen its own law. It doubled the maximum penalty and gave its regulator the power to compel internal company documents. That should give us pause about enforcement here. Australia's regulator is well established, with experienced staff and existing powers, and it still needed months to open investigations into five platforms and has yet to issue a fine.

This bill would create a brand new commission of three to five members that would be starting from nothing while facing the same companies. Officials have said it could take 18 months to set up. However, the minister has said that platforms would have to act as soon as this law comes into effect. Much of what decides whether this law works has been left to regulations that Parliament has not seen. That does not mean the bill is wrong, but it does mean that Parliament is being asked to place considerable trust in decisions that have not yet been made.

Those are not arguments against protecting children online. They are questions Parliament should answer before concluding that this framework will work as intended. How will enforcement work in practice, and will it be based on a user's age or their apparent location? What age verification and safe design regulations will ultimately be adopted, and what opportunity will Parliament have to review them? How will children's age verification data be collected, stored, protected and deleted, and what happens if that information is breached? Will the bill follow children to where they actually spend their time online, including gaming platforms, messaging services and content viewed while logged out? How will Parliament and Canadians know whether the law is achieving its goals and whether circumvention remains widespread? What standards will a platform have to meet in order to be exempt from the age restriction, and how transparent will those decisions be?

I opened by saying that a security system is judged by its weakest point. Here, that weakest point could be a teenager with a VPN, a flawed age verification process, inconsistent and unenforceable rules, unanswered questions from a bureaucratic commission, rival platforms not covered by legislation, data security questions or other unintended consequences that we have not yet identified.

● (1910)

A bill like this, with such important goals and significant consequences, deserves careful study. We need a law that holds up when it is tested. Let us send this bill to committee. Let us find and fix those weak points. Let us get it right to protect our children.

Kent MacDonald (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the first constituents I met upon getting elected lost their son to sextortion. This bill and our ability to get it right are very important to me and to the many parents out there who are living the nightmare of losing a child to this terrible plague.

I would ask the member across the way if she supports sending this bill to committee, hearing from experts and trying to get it right for all Canadians who are suffering?

Connie Cody: Mr. Speaker, I completely sympathize with parents who have gone through things like coercion, extortion, and online harms and scams. We are seeing this happen and it is escalating. It is something that needs to be discussed at committee. We need to find a way to protect not only our children but families. As technology is growing, we need to move in a way that looks at everything.

[*Translation*]

Steeve Lavoie (Beauport—Limoilou, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I was saying earlier, knowing what goes on is important to parents. A lot has changed over the past 30 years. I see it myself as a parent, as I said earlier. My 31-year-old son has three children. What he experiences is entirely different. I feel that parents need help and support.

In her speech, my colleague said that we are not sure whether some platforms will be included or excluded. I would also like to point out that other platforms could be created after the bill passes. We therefore have to make sure to retain some flexibility.

Does my colleague agree that bills like this one should retain some flexibility? Platforms evolve quickly, and new ones are always being created. We therefore have to act quickly and avoid amending bills all the time. The government also needs the flexibility to support parents as they do their job.

● (1915)

[*English*]

Connie Cody: Mr. Speaker, parents cannot take on some of the largest technology companies in the world by themselves. Parents can set boundaries, talk with their children and monitor device use, but they cannot control recommendation algorithms, platform design or how harmful content is promoted.

Platforms must be accountable for the risks they create, and government has an important role to play. My concern is simply ensuring that Bill C-34 gives parents meaningful support and meaningful tools, rather than creating systems that are more effective on paper than in practice.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate a number of the comments the member put on the record this evening.

I truly believe that every member of the House of Commons understands that there is harm to children and that the potential there is great. The issue is that as a Parliament, we have a responsibility to take action. Quite frankly, for me, the establishment of the digital safety commission of Canada would be a major step forward.

The member expressed some concerns with respect to it, but I wonder if she could provide her thoughts on the principle of having that commission. Is that something she supports?

Connie Cody: Mr. Speaker, I think everyone in this House agrees that online harms are real and that children need better protection. The question is not whether action is needed. The question is whether the specific measures before us would deliver the results that families are expecting. If a law can be bypassed easily, if children can simply migrate to other platforms or if key details are left to future regulations, those are issues Parliament has a responsibility to examine carefully. We can act urgently while still making sure we get this right.

Chi Nguyen (Spadina—Harbourfront, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming.

I rise in the chamber in support of Bill C-34, the safe social media act. As a mom of two young boys, I think a lot about what it means to help them navigate an increasingly digital and online world. I want them to be able to learn and keep up with the things that delight them, while also keeping them safe from the challenges that the digital environment presents.

I know first-hand that parents are doing their best to help their kids to navigate an online world that is changing faster than any generation has experienced before. I also know that keeping up with fast-paced changing technology is a full-time job. I frequently speak with parents about how difficult it is to understand the apps our children use, as well as the difficulty in managing the content and people they might encounter. By the time many of us feel that we have understood one platform, something new replaces it and the learning curve starts all over again.

Even if we do everything we can, there is still a steady stream of decisions that are being made about our children's online experiences that we do not always have control over. We may not always understand why an algorithm keeps recommending specific videos or how a platform responds to discrimination and harassment. We cannot know everything an AI chatbot might say to a child who stumbles across it on purpose or by accident. Those decisions often belong to companies that build and operate these services. They have responsibilities here too.

In a 2024 survey from Public Safety Canada, only three in 10 youth said they felt safe online. Parents were even less likely to feel their children were safe in these digital spaces. The data is alarming. Young people spend so much of their time learning how to interact with one another and the world online. This is the new place where they explore who they are and find a sense of belonging. We also know that these consequences reach well beyond the screen. Classmates can circulate messages and pictures too quickly for parents, teachers and educators to keep up. All of this has an impact on whether our children can walk into school the next morning.

With artificial intelligence advancing at a rapid pace, we are at a crossroads. As legislators and parliamentarians, we have a responsibility to act now to ensure that these technologies are safe and accountable and that they support, rather than harm, the well-being of our children. That is the future I want for my two young boys and for every child growing up in Canada.

It is in this context that our government is introducing Bill C-34. This legislation would ensure that social media services and AI chatbots are safe by design. The bill includes measures such as a ban on social media for those under the age of 16 until a service can prove it is safe, a new digital safety commission to adjudicate the efficacy of a platform's safety policies and hold them to account, and faster removal processes for harmful or victimizing content. The commission would be responsible for the enforcement of the provisions of the act.

In this era where we are all navigating lives that have a physical and digital presence, there is a real urgency to act and to do this thoughtfully and well for all Canadians. It is an issue that many stakeholders who are concerned with the well-being of children and women have raised the alarm bells on, and on behalf of the residents of Spadina—Harbourfront, I am grateful that we are using our legislative tools to act.

One of the key measures of Bill C-34 is that it would ban children under the age of 16 from having accounts on social media services. AI chatbots would be subject to the duty to protect children and the duty to act responsibly, requiring them to mitigate risks of harmful behaviour by or induced by the chatbot. Everyone has a responsibility to protect our kids.

Bullying 25 years ago often ended when the school day was over. Today, children carry that harassment with them everywhere they go, with direct access through their phones and on social media platforms. They are also more vulnerable to online predators and other harmful actors who can now reach them easily. From online harassment and the spread of misinformation to the proliferation of harmful content such as revenge porn and AI-generated deepfakes, young people are facing challenges that previous generations could never have imagined.

In this new digital era, AI, algorithms and deepfake technologies are also enabling new forms of gender-based harassment and violence toward women and young girls. We must take a whole-of-government approach and consider how these measures, along with the actions we have taken over the past year, connect together. We moved forward on part of this work through Bill C-16, the Protecting Victims Act, whereby our government introduced reforms to protect children in online environments. This has included expanding the child luring offence to better address sextortion, criminalizing non-consensual sexual deepfakes, criminalizing bestiality depictions used to groom children, increasing penalties for child exploitation offences, and requiring online platforms to preserve evidence longer so offenders can be brought to justice. As a woman who stands in public office, it has been incredibly powerful to see our government work alongside other parties in the House to ensure that the sharing of non-consensual sexual deepfakes was criminalized.

● (1920)

No one bill can address every angle of these harms. Our legislation, prevention efforts, stakeholder groups and other supports must work in concert together to keep young people safe.

Last week, I hosted a documentary film screening on the Hill where parliamentarians, staff and community partners gathered together to watch *Miss Representation: Rise Up*. The documentary, directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom, explores how social media and AI are fuelling a cultural backlash against women and young girls, affecting their mental health, autonomy and political power. The film is a sequel to the original, which debuted 15 years ago, and this update demonstrates how women's and young girls' experiences with media and technology have intensified quickly over time. The film not only reminds us of the harms the online space can present to young women but also sends a powerful message that technological innovation must be accompanied by accountability.

We need social media platforms to have the framework and regulations in place so that our children are safe online. Bill C-34 is the first piece of national legislation that establishes a regulatory framework for AI chatbots. The bill would require greater transparency from AI chatbots and impose obligations to direct users to intervention services when they express suicidal thoughts, self-harm or an intent to seriously harm others. It would also require operators to provide the new digital safety commission with clear, transparent information on their policies for referring conversations to the RCMP and other emergency services in the case of threats to seriously harm others. The tragedy in Tumbler Ridge is a stark reminder of what is at stake. It reinforces an important principle as we build this legislation and framework.

Canadians expect online platforms to have robust safety protocols and escalation practices in place to protect online safety and ensure that law enforcement is warned about potential violence. We must and can do better for our children and their families. The bill is an important step toward creating a safer digital environment for children across Canada. As the world changes, our legislation must reflect the new terrain we are living in, and the responsibility does not lie with parents and educators alone.

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to participate in a round table discussion with Pinterest alongside representatives from civil society and academia. The message that came through clearly was that we must get the legislation right. That includes building a system that provides strong protections for children and young people while also recognizing that digital platforms are not all designed or used in the same way. Bill C-34 reflects this approach. The commission can exempt certain companies from the age limit requirement if they demonstrate that they meet adequate safeguards designed to protect children and youth.

Our government was elected on a mandate to protect Canadians, and that responsibility includes our children. Many democracies around the world are already taking action and understanding that the digital age requires new safeguards and standards of accountability. As a middle power with strong democratic values and a tradition of defending human rights, Canada now has the opportunity to help shape the growing global conversation on digital safety. We can work alongside our international partners and establish common standards, best practices and shared expertise.

As we consider what will work best in Canada, we have an opportunity to encourage platforms to design safer spaces from the beginning. That means giving clear responsibilities to put young people's safety at the centre of how their products are built. Blanket bans alone are not enough to support young people navigating the digital world. We must pair this with the right skill sets to recognize harm and set boundaries so everyone can use the technology responsibly. This can act as a model for the rest of us as we all trip through using new technologies together.

We do not have to choose between innovation and safety. Canada can lead with both. Through legislation such as Bill C-34, Canada can help set the standard for a digital future that puts the well-being of young people first.

● (1925)

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate the hon. member's speech. The difficulty I struggle with is that even as good as the bill is, there is an assumption that these so-called platforms have a right to exist, that they are a part of our world and we cannot do anything about it.

I wonder if the government has given any thought, or whether it would be something the member could take up within the caucus, to how if we did not call them platforms and instead called them publishers, we would have a mountain of common law for what we do when a publisher publishes something damaging. If there is joint and several liability, it is the person who posts something anonymously and the publisher who are responsible. This is a larger question, but I want to pose it now.

Chi Nguyen: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague has asked a fantastic and very thoughtful question about where this sits in the ecosystem. We are all asking thoughtful questions about what the right regulatory regimes and tools are, and I think the approach that our government is taking around an independent digital safety commission will help give the guidance that is needed here.

Hon. Rechie Valdez (Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the things the hon. member mentioned was the documentary *Miss Representation: Rise Up*, which I had the opportunity of watching. In it, there were a couple of stories of incredible young women, and what they were experiencing online was deeply disturbing. In terms of the new legislation, the digital safety act and the digital safety commission of Canada act, I wonder what the member would like to say on this that would help address some of the concerns of those young women in the documentary.

Chi Nguyen: Madam Speaker, the minister and I really enjoyed watching the film together. At this time when many young women are thinking about what it means to step into and engage in democracy, we have a responsibility to step forward and make sure we get this right. There are real threats to Canadian democracy, and we want to make sure we can all participate safely. What we are doing here sets the groundwork for that.

[*Translation*]

Steeve Lavoie (Beauport—Limoilou, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her excellent speech, which I really appreciated.

She has two kids. I have four kids and three grandkids. We will be hearing about kids and grandkids all evening. I talk about this a lot because I am proud of it. I am 51 years old, and I had my first son when I was 20. That kind of thing is life-changing. My son is now 31 and has three children of his own, but things are different these days. The world has changed. When I was 20, we did not have tablets or cell phones. We did our best. When I look at him now with his three boys, I wonder how he handles all this, given everything that is currently happening on digital platforms.

I have a question for my colleague. Does she believe that the government should help parents by supporting them, not by replacing them?

At the end of the day, parents are the ones responsible for taking care of their children and making decisions about them every day. However, a responsible government can certainly support parents in raising their children. I would like to know: Does my colleague think the government should help parents?

[*English*]

Chi Nguyen: Madam Speaker, today I actually received an email from my children's school that said there has been some sharing of deepfakes circulating in grade 7 and grade 8. We have a role, everyone, including the government, and there is a piece of work around education and promotion that is really critical. That is work we are taking on as a government, and we need to do this in partnership with stakeholders to get this right. There is a lot of hard work ahead.

● (1930)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wanted to reaffirm the targets set out in the bill for harmful content: non-consensual intimate content, child sexual victimization, content inducing a child to self-harm, child bullying, hate, incitement to violence, and terrorism or violent extremism content. It is important that we are establishing that a great deal of hurt is there, and it is the primary reason this legislation is necessary, which would be enforced by having the commission put in place.

Chi Nguyen: Madam Speaker, I agree.

Pauline Rochefort (Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State (Rural Development), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-34, an act to enact the digital safety act and the digital safety commission of Canada act.

I want residents of Nipissing—Timiskaming to know why I will be voting for this bill, so I will explain. I will start with a question. It will show my age, but the question is simple. Do members remember when keeping a child safe meant knowing where they were and who they were with? Many parents and grandparents will remember those days. The rule was simple: Be home before dark.

Today, a child can be sitting beside a parent in the living room and talking to someone online who the parent knows nothing about. The child is home, and the parent feels reassured, but the risks on the screen may be hidden. The front door may be locked, but the phone is still connected. A cruel message can arrive at any hour, a humiliating image can spread in seconds, and bullying can follow a child home from school.

Childhood has changed. Parenting, as my colleague described previously, has become more complicated. Living in a peaceful northern Ontario community does not shield a child from online harm. We protect children at school and on our roads. They deserve the same protection online.

Parents, schools and governments all have a role to play, and so do the companies behind TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, YouTube, others that may be out there and others that will come. I think it is very important to note that all these companies provide so many benefits. They bring benefits to our lives. In northern Ontario, where distances are part of our daily life, online platforms help young people stay close to friends and family, including their grandparents. They help them learn, create and connect. Those connections matter, and there are many more benefits we could talk about. Our task is to preserve those benefits while reducing the risks.

[*Translation*]

The evidence shows that action is needed. According to Statistics Canada, one in four young Canadians aged 12 to 17 reported experiencing cyber-bullying in the previous year. Among young people who have a hard time making friends, that number is even higher, at one in three. Let us think about that. These are young people who struggle to make connections, who go online and are subjected to cyber-bullying. Behind these figures lie children, families and very real suffering.

[*English*]

What would Bill C-34 do? I will highlight the three major changes.

First, it would provide stronger protection for children under 16. The bill would prevent children under 16 from having accounts on social media services. However, a platform could receive an exemption if it demonstrated adequate safeguards for children. That gives companies an incentive to act and an incentive to make their services safer.

Second, the bill would create a digital safety commission. It would review companies' safety plans and oversee whether they are meeting their duties. If a company is earning money supplying services to Canadians, it only makes sense that it should explain how it is managing those risks. Someone should be there to check whether its measures are adequate. That would be the role of the digital safety commission.

Third, the bill would require action on some of the most harmful material online. This includes content that sexually victimizes a child and intimate images shared without consent. The proposed framework would require these types of content to be made inaccessible within hours of being either identified by the service provider or flagged by a user. Members can imagine a young person discovering that an intimate image of them is being shared. We can imagine their fear and a parent trying to find a way to deal with the issue. In those moments, time matters.

The bill would also address risks from artificial intelligence and, specifically, chatbots. Regulated chatbot services would have to take steps to reduce harmful behaviour and direct users toward crisis support in certain serious situations.

Now, some parents will say, “I know my child. I know what's best. I should decide.” I respect that view. Parents know their children in ways that governments never will, but parents do not design the systems that decide which video appears next to a video that they approved. They cannot control how quickly an image can spread or check every account that comes into contact with their child. In this environment, how much can a family truly manage? We can think of a parent who is working shift work, a caregiver who has several children, a grandparent who knows little about the app. Online safety should not depend entirely on a family's spare time or technical knowledge.

We already accept that children need different rules as they grow. We set minimum driving ages, require safety features in vehicles and teach young drivers how to use the road. While social media certainly is different from driving, the principle is useful. Education, family guidance and safety standards can work together.

Just as there are underage drivers, there will also be some who will try to get around the rules. That is why the bill would require covered platforms to use effective age checks with oversight from the digital safety commission. Companies that fail to meet their duties could face corrective orders and substantial financial penalties. A measure does not have to prevent every incident to serve a purpose. Seat belts are an excellent example of that. They do not, unfortunately, prevent every injury. We still require them because reducing harm matters.

The test should be clear. Do these measures work, and are they proportionate to the risks?

● (1935)

[*Translation*]

Some key questions also need to be answered. How can age be verified without compromising privacy? Who will have access to the information collected? How long will it be kept? Those are all great questions. The bill provides for safeguards regarding the information used during the age verification process, including its protection and destruction once the verification is complete. It also restricts the collection and use for the purposes of the verification. Protecting children also means protecting their personal information. The two go hand in hand.

It is important to note that Canadians want us to act. In a March 2026 Angus Reid poll of 4,000 people, 75% of respondents supported a ban on social media for those under the age of 16. People in Nipissing—Timiskaming are also calling on us to better protect children online.

There are certainly things that should give us pause. Certain details will be difficult to sort out, but doing nothing also has consequences.

● (1940)

[*English*]

For a child being bullied tonight, the harm is already happening. For a family trying to stop an intimate image from spreading, the need is immediate. We cannot promise a world without risk, but we can take reasonable steps to make it safer. As Parliament studies this bill, young people themselves must have a voice. I encourage young people from Nipissing—Timiskaming to contact my office and tell us what helps them online, what concerns them and what would make their experience safer. We need to hear from them.

I conclude by saying that, ultimately, whether we are young, old, parents or young people, we all share a responsibility to help ensure that all children are prepared for the world they are entering. We have a responsibility to ensure that it is a world that is safe for them. Children deserve a safe world.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague opposite mentioned rural and remote communities. We know we need these safeguards to keep kids safe online, but there has actually been comprehensive research that shows that with the right and appropriate safeguards, particularly for teens who are more in the 15 to 16 years old age range, some forms of social media might actually provide benefits, particularly in rural communities and particularly for young sexual minority groups. These young adults may depend on online platforms for peer support, cultural connection and access to resources unavailable in their off-line environments. Systemic academic reviews confirm these facts.

I am not saying there should not be online safeguards for kids, because there have to be, but if the government is going to apply these safeguards, there is also a risk that these resources could be removed.

What is she doing to replace them?

Pauline Rochefort: Madam Speaker, yes, certainly I am from what we would define as a northern rural community. Actually, in the past month or so, we have been making many calls to residents in our riding. There is very strong support for this particular bill, and there is concern around social media exposure for kids 16 and under. I do recognize all the benefits she pointed out, and I do not disagree with what she said. At the same time, there is a world out there that is also in need of some regulation, and that is what this bill is proposing.

Hon. Rechie Valdez (Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism), Lib.): Madam Speaker, Miriam from my riding has said that becoming a new parent recently has made her so scared of how quickly social media is changing. She hopes her son grows in a world with a safer Internet space. She can only protect him so much. Every other product a child uses had to meet a safety standard before it reaches them. There are car seats. There are medicines and there are toys. When he grows older and would like a phone, she is scared of how much access he will get to an unregulated online world. When it comes to kids' safety, the apps on phones are the one exception not required to meet a safety standard.

I just wanted to ask the member for her thoughts on what Miriam said.

Pauline Rochefort: Madam Speaker, I would simply like to respond by saying that there is a reason democracies around the world, from Australia to the United Kingdom, are taking action on this issue. It is exactly for the reason the member described, and this is why it is timely for us to take action as a country.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, again, I just want to point out that my colleague opposite actually did not answer the question. She did not talk about what resources would be available to young sexual minorities in rural communities who might use, with appropriate safeguards, certain types of social media to find resources and find community. She did not answer that question and that is a concern in her riding that she failed to be accountable for.

We know from Australia what has happened with its very similar legislation is that this has actually pushed kids off safe spaces and into the dark web. The bill is silent on how the government would handle that. In fact, it is asking Parliament to devolve a lot of power into regulation without answering some of these key questions. Also, the bill does not include some of the most pernicious places that have a lack of online safety, like gaming platforms.

Why would my colleague be silent on the types of resources that would be removed from young sexual minorities in her riding? Why would she be silent and not provide more details or scrutiny on the fact that certain types of platforms where we know this type of abuse happens, like gaming platforms, are not included in this bill?

● (1945)

Pauline Rochefort: Madam Speaker, that is a fairly long question that has been posed and that is why I am proposing that this bill go to committee. It should be studied and discussed. I think that is exactly the type of question that is very valid and should be brought up at the committee level.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Brampton West.

Our need to provide better safeguards to protect children online is real. In fact, just to illustrate this point, one in four Canadian youth aged 12 to 17 has experienced some sort of online harm. Police reported online sexual exploitation reached 16,905 incidents in 2024, and this rate has risen under the Liberal government 347% in the last decade. Parents are trying to provide some safeguards for their kids online, but they are also asking for our help. Any approach that we take to provide these safeguards should support parents while also protecting both their rights and their children's rights, and parents' right to determine how their child becomes a digital citizen while ensuring that environment is safe and also looking at the privacy and speech rights for Canadians.

The question that we should be looking at in this House is not whether we should act, but how and whether this bill is sufficient or if it is asking us to undertake measures that devolve powers that we as parliamentarians have, for vague assurances that really deserve answers from the government.

I have a lot of questions with this bill, and I am going to start with the matter that we were just debating in the previous section, which is the ban on social media accounts. My first question relates to the best practice that we have already seen as Australia has rolled out similar provisions. We have seen that most kids at the age of 16 still had accounts months later. Harm complaints did not meaningfully decline. In fact, teens turned to VPNs, shared family log-ins or simply lied about their age. The ban did not actually do anything.

With regard to this aspect of Bill C-34, the questions I would have are the following. If a teenager is pushed off a large platform that has a well-established trust, safety team and system, where do they go, because they are going to go somewhere, and has the government been seized with this question, particularly knowing that other jurisdictions have already had this experience? Are they going to smaller, unmoderated corners of the Internet where their parents cannot see them and has the government thought about whether this measure may push vulnerable kids somewhere darker on the Internet? How will the government measure to know whether this is working? The government has been silent on these issues.

This deserves much more scrutiny because of how the bill proposes that the ban would work. A platform could apply to the new commission that is proposed in the bill for an “exemption” if it shows “adequate safeguards”. Adequate by what standard, set by whom and when? The bill is silent on these things. If the largest platforms could win exemptions, is this a ban or is it a negotiation between a regulator, not elected officials, and big tech held outside of this chamber? I have a problem with that. If safeguards exist that are good enough to earn an exemption, why not write them in law for every platform today? These are questions the government has not answered, and I suspect that it is facing internal questions within its caucus on this issue as well.

Bill C-34 sets out the general types of services it would cover, social media, livestreaming, adult content platforms and AI chatbots, but the exact test for which specific services count as a regulated social media service is left to regulations to be written later. Parliament is being asked to pass a bill before knowing where that line falls. That decision would be made by cabinet, not by this House, so we are being asked to devolve that power. In fact, the ban itself would not be automatic through this law. It would only apply to the platforms that cabinet later chooses to name in regulation. We should probably be having that debate in Parliament.

Additionally, many types of the severe dangers children face online, like grooming and sextortion, happen on gaming platforms and chat services. Would those be covered under this bill? It does not seem like it. The government may say that cabinet can add new categories of services, but why is that being left to regulation? Why are we not having that debate now? I would like to know why the government is silent on this and if it is being silent for a reason. Is it because of lobbying or is it because existing safeguards are good enough or it does not think that it can make privacy work or because the bill is not technology agnostic? Those are all questions that the government should be able to answer.

● (1950)

The bill is also quiet on how age verification would be done. Those details would also be left to regulations, and that raises big questions for me. Will Canadians be asked, for example, to provide a driver's license to access social media? Australia's law specifically says that no one can be forced to hand over a government ID to prove their age, yet the bill is silent on that matter.

Bill C-34 is also silent on the use of third party vendors, which platforms often hire to run age verification checks. How would the government make sure that those vendors do not reuse that data, and how would an operator destroy that data while also keeping the records the bill requires to prove it complied? Protecting kids should never, ever require every adult to hand over their identity to the government, and the bill is silent on these matters.

Much scrutiny needs to be paid to the amount of regulatory power that the bill would hand over to a body that does not yet exist. Independent analysts have counted roughly 50 major decisions left to cabinet and the new commission after Parliament votes on the bill. Questions like which services are covered, what age verification is adequate, what counts as safe design, how complaints are judged and who gets an exemption remain unanswered.

These questions deserve answers, because these make up the substance of the law. When Parliament passes this frame but leaves the substance of what could amount to limitations on speech and privacy to regulation, we are opening the door to a process where well-resourced tech lobbyists and unelected bureaucrats would have a seat at the table and parliamentarians who are elected to make these decisions would not, and these are not minor decisions. The commission outlined in the bill would be the rule-maker, investigator, enforcer and judge. It would have a wide variety of powers that it could use to compel information, and its members would be appointed by cabinet, so these would essentially be political appointees. Also, until enough are appointed, the chairperson alone could make these decisions, and that deserves further scrutiny and debate as well.

Would these regulations come back to the House or a committee before they take effect? I do not think they would. I think that deserves scrutiny. The only review in the bill would be done by the minister, not by a committee of the House, and not until three years after it would take effect.

There are so many other questions. Where would a small operator go if it is fined? Why should unelected bureaucrats, rather than members accountable to Canadians, set the boundaries of online safety? There are ways that we could be having that discussion here today, but the government has again chosen to try to get us to devolve powers to regulators without answering some pretty fundamental questions around efficacy, like whether this would actually work and keep kids safe online and whether it would protect speech.

I have tried to stand in this place like Cassandra, for years, saying that we have a problem, and the government has been slow to act. As an individual member, I have spent years writing legislation. I tabled a revised bill, Bill C-216, which had a prescribed legislative duty of care for online operators. It is more tech-agnostic and also more clear in terms of what the powers are. It would also give more options to parents on how they curate their children's digital experience as they become digital citizens. Also, Bill C-216 is designed to keep pace with technologies like artificial intelligence, and I have questions about whether Bill C-34 can do that.

The last thing I will say is that my bill would clearly protect privacy. It would require operators to use age detection technology that they already use to target ads, with further privacy safeguards, rather than collecting IDs, and it would expressly prohibit using a digital ID.

I am wondering why the government took this approach, which has failed in previous legislation, and once again listened to bureaucrats. We know that parents need these safeguards, but given that the government has presented a bill that deserves so much scrutiny, I worry that it is going to lead to constitutional challenges down the road from regulations that perhaps have not been fully scrutinized here.

The government has a lot of explaining to do. There is a lot of detail that needs to be filled in by the government to ensure that kids are kept safe online and that Canadians' privacy and speech are protected.

● (1955)

[*Translation*]

Steeve Lavoie (Beauport—Limoilou, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her important speech on this bill, which is also important.

I listened carefully to her speech and I noticed that she repeated "why" a lot. I do not know how many times she repeated that word. That immediately made me think of the status quo. People often ask why we are not doing this or why we are not doing that. Some parents are saying that enough is enough with the status quo and that we need to move forward. Parents watching at home, who, like me, have seen how much things have changed in recent years, are concerned. They want the government to make decisions and move forward. Often, when we ask "why" too much, years go by and nothing gets done.

Does my colleague agree that the government should be able to help parents? Does she agree that this bill needs to move forward so we can develop guidelines to help parents properly raise their children?

[*English*]

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, I will counter my colleague with this: Why did the government not use my bill, which I wrote as a private member, in spite of it having 800,000 bureaucrats who could have done the job for it years ago? Why is the government so insistent on putting detail-free bills in the House of Commons? Why does the government presuppose that, in order to protect kids online, Canadians have to go forward without answers to questions?

I put forward a bill almost three years ago that answered the questions I asked today. The government could have stolen that bill. I had hoped it would. I have said that many times. The reality is that the government did not, and we are sitting here today because it has put forward bad iterations of legislation that Canadians have opposed.

Canadians want their kids kept safe online. They know that the government has dragged its feet in putting forward legislation that does that. I think it is incumbent upon the government to answer questions on whether or not this bill will actually work and whether it will keep Canadians' speech and privacy safe online.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I understand the member believes that her private member's bill is perfect legislation, that there is absolutely nothing wrong with it and that it should have received royal assent by now. Having said that, I think it is a universally held belief among all members of Parliament of all political stripes that there is a need to take some action.

Yes, the bill does not provide all the details the member talked about in her comments, but today we are dealing with the principle of the legislation. Many of the questions she has posed will be answered once the bill gets to the committee stage. We are not going to incorporate all the things the member has put on the record in a piece of legislation and then present it. It would be a 1,500-page bill if we listened to the member's comments.

Does the member support the principle of having a commission?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I do not know about you, Madam Speaker, but I sure do not like it when a man tells me what I said when I did not say it. I am sure you would sympathize with that.

What I have said in the past is that my bill was a starting point three years ago, and it is not 1,500 pages; it is about 30 pages. It clearly outlines the duty of care that online operators would have.

What the Liberals and the minister are saying is that all of the hundreds of thousands of bureaucrats we have could not possibly have written a bill that tells Canadians exactly what the bill would do. They could not possibly have done that. They are asking Parliament to devolve the power we have to unelected bureaucrats who would be making these decisions at the table with tech giants. That is what they are asking for, and I am saying no.

The residents of Calgary Nose Hill want answers. I am asking these questions because it was entirely possible for the government to have a bill that had answers in it.

The member is wrong and he knows it. He has been around long enough. I will not have that man try to say that I said something that I did not. That is preposterous. However, I will demand answers on behalf of my constituents, because this matters and we have to get it right. If we do not answer these questions, we will not.

● (2000)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, does the member, in principle, support the need to have a commission that would be able to ensure there are fines and that there is a higher sense of accountability on the Internet to protect the children of Canada?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Speaker, I am just going to look at the bill. The proposed commission would have sweeping powers with little accountability. It would serve as a super-regulator. It would act as rule-maker, investigator, enforcer and prosecutor, and have hearings in secret. I want to know what that means, and it deserves a lot of scrutiny. The government should have put that in the bill.

Amarjeet Gill (Brampton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am proud to rise today on behalf of the people of Brampton West to speak to Bill C-34, the safe social media act.

We all know that our children are our future. They are our greatest responsibility. They are counting on us to guide them, protect them and give them the tools to succeed, not just in our classrooms or in our communities, but in the digital world as well.

Protecting our children online is not optional; it is our responsibility. As Conservatives, we believe that protecting children and respecting fundamental freedoms must go hand in hand. That is why Bill C-34 deserves serious, thoughtful examination, not political slogans or another layer of bureaucracy, but real answers, real accountability and, most importantly, real protection for Canadian children.

Let me ask a simple question: Who is protecting our children when they go online? Is it parents? Is it technology companies? Is it the government? Are we leaving our children to navigate a digital world that even adults struggle to understand? These are the questions being asked by families in Brampton West and across Canada, as well as by teachers in our schools and grandparents worried about their grandchildren. Their concerns are legitimate because families want their children to grow up safe, healthy and confident.

Today, as we debate Bill C-34, I believe we must keep one principle at the centre of our discussion: Children deserve protection, parents deserve a meaningful voice and powerful technology companies must answer serious questions about the safety of their platforms.

The evidence of the dangers our children face online raises serious concerns. According to Statistics Canada, approximately one in four Canadian youth aged 12 to 17 has experienced cyber-bullying. In 2024, police reported 16,905 incidents of online child sexual exploitation. That represents an increase of 347% compared to 2014. Behind every statistic is a child: a son, a daughter or a student. Behind many of these children are parents who are worried, overwhelmed and searching for answers.

Technology has changed and childhood has changed, but our responsibility to protect children remains intact. We all recognize the benefits of technology. It supports education. It creates opportunity. It allows young Canadians to learn, innovate and succeed. However, what happens when the same technology becomes a source of exploitation, intimidation or emotional harm? What happens when a child becomes the target of cyber-bullying? What happens when an AI chatbot encourages harmful behaviour instead of directing a child toward help? Who takes responsibility when something goes terribly wrong?

Canadians remember the heartbreaking story of Amanda Todd, a young life lost after experiences of sextortion and cyber-bullying. Her story reminds us that what happens online can have devastating consequences in the real world. We owe it to children like Amanda to ask difficult questions and demand meaningful answers.

There is another serious concern: the way these digital platforms are designed. Autoplay videos, constant notifications and algorithms that recommend more and more content are features designed to keep users engaged, but are they designed with children's well-being in mind? When a teenager watches one troubling video, should an algorithm be allowed to recommend dozens more? When a child is struggling emotionally, should a platform prioritize engagement over safety? When companies have the technology to identify dangerous patterns, what responsibility should they have to intervene? Should the safety of children ever come second to corporate profits? These are questions Parliament must examine, and big tech companies must be prepared to answer them.

● (2005)

I also want to speak directly about parents. Parents are doing their best. They set rules, monitor devices and encourage responsible behaviour, but parents are facing a digital environment that changes almost every day, with new applications, new algorithms and new AI systems. How can a parent control an algorithm they cannot see? How can a parent stop a stranger from contacting their child through a platform they do not operate? How can parents protect their children when companies control the technology, the data and the design? Parents should never be left fighting billion-dollar technology companies on their own, but neither should government replace parents as the primary decision-makers for their children. This is an important distinction.

A recent survey found that 75% of Canadians support banning social media for children under age 16, yet 72% believe that parents should hold primary responsibility for regulating their children's social media use. What does that tell us? Canadians want stronger safeguards, but they also want parental authority respected. They want government to establish reasonable protections. They want technology companies to be held accountable.

The question is whether Bill C-34 would provide the right mechanisms to deliver on Canadians' demands. For example, the bill proposes age verification or age examination requirements, but how would those systems work? Would Canadians be required to upload government-issued ID? Would companies collect sensitive biometric information? Who would store the information, and where? Who would have access to it, and what would happen if that information is stolen?

There is also the question of effectiveness. Bill C-34 proposes restrictions on social media accounts for children under the age of 16, but what would happen if teenagers find ways around those restrictions? What would happen if they use VPNs? What would happen if they move to smaller, less regulated platforms? Could well-intentioned restrictions unintentionally push vulnerable children toward more dangerous environments? How would the government measure success? Would success means fewer accounts or fewer children being bullied, exploited and harmed?

We must also examine the role of AI. AI chatbots are becoming part of everyday life. Young people use them for homework, for information and sometimes for personal advice, but what safeguards exist when a vulnerable child turns to a chatbot during an emotional crisis? How would companies identify risk? How quickly would they have to respond? How would Parliament ensure that these protections keep pace with rapidly changing technology? These questions deserve clear answers.

Another issue is government accountability. Bill C-34 proposes a digital safety commission with significant regulatory and enforcement powers. How would its powers be limited? Who would oversee its decisions? What safeguards would prevent regulatory overreach? What opportunities would Canadians have to challenge decisions? How would Parliament ensure that unelected regulators remain accountable to the people? Effective legislation requires clear rules, clear responsibilities and meaningful oversight.

As we examine Bill C-34, I want to leave the House with a few final questions. Would we be putting the safety and well-being of children at the centre of our decisions? Would we be giving parents a meaningful role and practical tools to protect their families? Would we be asking the right questions of powerful technology companies about the risks created by their platforms? Would we be protecting the privacy, rights and freedoms of Canadians while addressing genuine online dangers? Last, would these measures being considered actually make children safer? These questions deserve careful study. They deserve evidence. They deserve input from parents, educators, experts and young people.

Let me conclude with this. Our children deserve more than promises, and Canadians deserve more than another government announcement. They deserve answers, accountability and results. Our responsibility is clear: Our children deserve safety, and our parents deserve a voice. It is time to protect our children, empower our parents, hold big tech accountable and respect Canadians' freedoms.

● (2010)

Hon. Rechie Valdez (Minister of Women and Gender Equality and Secretary of State (Small Business and Tourism), Lib.): Madam Speaker, Daughter Project Canada is “working to end the sexual exploitation of children and youth through awareness, prevention and advocacy.” Its website states that one in 10 children in Canada is sexually victimized before they turn 18 years old. This is an urgent situation.

The member talks about how the platforms should be held accountable. Through this legislation, we would be standing up the digital safety act, and then of course the digital safety commission of Canada act, which would ensure that we are able to regulate these services. I would like the member to share his thoughts on that.

Amarjeet Gill: Madam Speaker, as I said in my speech, these are the concerns we need to consider very carefully, and we need to consider a full examination of the things we are going to put forward, because we know and understand that every child matters. It is very important for us, as Canadians and as parliamentarians, to bring forward laws that are going to help Canadians and to hold people accountable for such crimes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, the minister asked my colleague a question about keeping kids safe online, yet we know there are platforms where a big bulk of the stats she mentioned occurred and that would not be covered under this bill, such as Roblox, for example, and other online gaming platforms. Conservatives delivered a bill that would have had much more robust coverage and be technology agnostic.

I wonder if my colleague understands why the government has put forward such a detail-free bill if it wants to keep kids safe online. Why would it leave all these regulations to be negotiated by rich tech company lobbyists and not by parliamentarians?

Amarjeet Gill: Madam Speaker, my colleague's questions are wonderful, because that is exactly what Parliament must examine. Technology companies have enormous resources. They control algorithms, platforms and user data, but are they investing enough in protecting children? If big tech companies can design algorithms to maximize profit, should they not be expected to design safeguards that prioritize children's safety? That is the question Canadians deserve to have answered. That is what we have to provide to all Canadian families and all children so we can better protect our children in the future.

[*Translation*]

Steeve Lavoie (Beauport—Limoilou, Lib.): Madam Speaker, many people are living in the past, but parents today are dealing with these issues in the present, and they need help now. What I heard from my colleague is that he has genuine concerns and legitimate questions about how to protect children and help parents do just that.

Will my colleague vote in favour of the bill so that we can move forward, address these issues, act swiftly and as soon as possible, and provide support to parents as they raise their children?

[*English*]

Amarjeet Gill: Madam Speaker, multiple times, I have said that the Conservative Party and I will support anything that is going to help Canadians. This is what we have shown in Parliament as well.

The problem I am seeing right now is that parental rights and government responsibility are two different things. To answer the member's question, parents must remain the primary decision-makers for their children, but how can they protect their children from algorithms they cannot see and technologies they cannot control? The government must support parents, not replace them.

● (2015)

Danielle Martin (University—Rosedale, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time this evening with the member for Toronto—St. Paul's.

It is a privilege to rise this evening to participate in this important debate about Bill C-34, the safe social media act.

As a member of Parliament representing an urban riding where social media has had a profound impact on every aspect of city life, as the mother of a teenager who lived through the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic just as she should have been building her in-person community, and as a family doctor who cared for people whose lives were changed both for the better and for the worse by digital tools, I support this bill and want to thank the minister for the extensive and thoughtful work that has gone into its development.

The use of social media has completely transformed all our lives, and many platforms have played and will continue to play positive roles in our communities. For a person trying to connect with others affected by the same rare disease they struggle with, for a community seeking to organize in support of a charitable cause, or for a friend group trying to gather to discuss its next favourite book, social media platforms have offered ways for people to connect with one another and to build community.

However, we also all know that to leave platforms unregulated is to put our kids in harm's way. The activity on these platforms can teach young people to hate others. It can teach them to hate themselves. Platforms can offer a window for predators engaging in human trafficking and violence, and they can stunt the development of the very skill they are ostensibly designed to support: the skill of socializing with other human beings.

[*Translation*]

Leaving these platforms unregulated amounts to putting our children at risk. We owe it to our communities and to our children to demand better from platforms that enable harmful activities and use algorithms that jeopardize mental health. In communities across the country, parents are concerned about the impact of social media on their children's health and well-being. They are asking us to take action, and we have a responsibility to listen to them.

[*English*]

At its core, the purpose of Bill C-34 is to protect Canadians in online spaces. It would ensure that social media services and AI chatbots are safe by design. The major pieces proposed in the bill include a ban on social media for people under the age of 16 until a service can prove that it is safe, a new digital safety commission that would ensure that these platforms are held accountable and are working for Canadians, and the ability to remove harmful or victimizing content quickly.

While everyone came to the conversation with their own experiences and perspectives about what getting it right looks like, just as we are hearing in the House tonight, there were some very clear messages that I took home with me. First, we need to make sure that platforms are held accountable for the harms they enable. Second, we need research and evidence in order to understand whether our protections are working, and the generation of that evidence must be ongoing. Third, we need to make sure that, in protecting children, we do not take away access to the safe spaces and communities our young people depend on. I want to touch briefly on each of these.

With respect to harms, it is clear that social media platforms as currently used have negative impacts on the health, mental health and well-being of our children and youth, and there is a very wide range of evidence to support this statement. We have heard some of it in the debate today already. The Media Technology Monitor research report of 2023 reported that one in five teens has experienced bullying or harassment online. StatsCan, in 2023, found that anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation increase with more frequent use of online platforms.

As many parliamentarians have, I have really engaged with my community on the subject of making the online space safer for our kids. People feel very strongly about it, and they want to make their voices are heard. As part of that engagement process, over the summer, I held a round table on the proposed bill in my community of University—Rosedale, along with my colleague, the member for Taiaiako'n—Parkdale—High Park.

Participants in that round table included the leadership of organizations such as Kids Help Phone, experts from SickKids Hospital, academics, parents, local community organizations, and importantly, youth. We heard from dedicated professionals who work directly with children, from experts studying the impacts of social media and AI chatbots, and from people who understand how these platforms are designed and how they are operated. The feedback was clear: Canadians support this bill, and they want to make sure it is done right.

● (2020)

There are negative impacts on girls and women in particular from the unregulated use of deepfakes and sexual violence online. There is proof that these apps are enabling human trafficking and targeting vulnerable people. Social media apps are being used to track and target youth and kids for the purpose of committing violence and for the purpose of social exclusion. I think we have all heard these stories, and the experts at our round table spoke compellingly to these harms. The bill would establish the mechanisms for holding these services accountable.

As outlined in the bill, we would have three core duties for social media services. The duty to act responsibly would require regulated services to assess and mitigate risks linked to harmful content. The duty to protect children would require services to build age-appropriate safeguards into the design and operation of their products. The duty to make certain content inaccessible would require faster removal and action on the most serious victimizing content, such as child sexual exploitation material and intimate content that is communicated or posted without consent.

Further to that, because I know we have heard this evening that we need to have detail, we would have the ability to instruct services to regularly identify and assess certain risks, to mandate transparency in chatbot services and to require services to transparently inform the new digital safety commission of their policies for referring conversations to the RCMP and to emergency services in case of threats to seriously harm others. As a health care provider, that is one I feel particularly strongly about. There would be an obligation on the part of the services to publish a digital safety plan. If these services can prove that they are safe spaces, we can have a conversation. We can work together.

One of the things we need to recognize is that these harms do not always come from what we or our kids believe to be safe and innocent spaces. The online world is constantly changing, and this is one of the reasons why having a regulator is so important. We cannot legislate for every possible future. A platform that might look like a new place to have fun, play games or share pictures can suddenly become a place where young people are exposed to harmful content, contacted by strangers or targeted by people who want to take advantage of them.

During our round table, we heard concerns about platforms that may not be traditionally thought of as social media, including gaming platforms, where some of these same risks can exist. We need to look at how these platforms actually function, how they are used and what risks they create for children and youth. We cannot rely only on what a platform says it is designed to do. We need to look at what is actually happening to the people who use it when they are on these apps or these sites, and we need to be continuously keeping up with that technology, which is why passing legislation is only one part of this work.

We also need to understand whether the protections we put in place are actually making a difference. This was the second take-home from our round table, that we must invest in research to monitor the impacts of these measures and the ongoing identification of the gaps. We need to study what young people are experiencing online, ongoingly, and learn from other countries. In other words, our policies must be informed by evidence. We must contribute to that growing body of evidence in this field, which is quite new to the human experience.

This brings me to the last lesson I learned at our round table, which is, at its core, about not overcorrecting. I heard from Kids Help Phone that the online universe can, at times, be the only safe space for many kids and youth who have nowhere else to go. For a young person who has questions they cannot safely ask the adults in their life, for a child who is not safe in their own home, we need to be thoughtful about ensuring that we do not close the doors a child may knock on to ask for help.

[*Translation*]

Our aim must be to make digital spaces safer, without depriving vulnerable young people of the connections and resources they need.

● (2025)

[*English*]

Bill C-34 has emerged from the grassroots of our communities. As a government, it is our job to listen to parents, youth and experts, and to hold accountable powerful companies who have not seen it as their job to protect our kids. Bill C-34 is Canada's response to that reality, and I am proud to support it.

Amarjeet Gill (Brampton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, the hon. member mentioned mental health, anxiety and other harms that are happening to our kids and our children. Parents have the greatest responsibility for protecting their children, but parents cannot control hidden algorithms or the decisions high-tech billionaire companies are taking with regard to these platforms that are available to everyone.

How would Bill C-34 empower parents so that they can protect their children?

Danielle Martin: Madam Speaker, of course parents have primary responsibility for their children. We also know that parents are no match for these tech giants whose strategies are evolving every day. It is important that we have regulation of those companies and that we hold them accountable. There needs to be ongoing public education for children and youth, parents, teachers and caregivers, as well as the people who are coaching our kids in sports and beyond in our communities, so that we all know how to recognize the signs that a kid is in trouble, whether it is in the digital world or in the real life world, as we say.

Lisa Hepfner (Hamilton Mountain, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I also held a couple of round tables on the safe social media act. Some of the people who participated in my round tables were public health medical professionals. I know that the member has a similar background. What they really zeroed in on was the mental health weight on young people today. They are seeing this play out in communities.

Perhaps the member would take a moment to expound on that a bit more. I know she touched on it already in her speech.

Danielle Martin: Madam Speaker, indeed, mental health is one of the major reasons this bill is so critical at this time. We certainly saw a massive spike in mental illness and distress among young people coming out of the pandemic and since then as social media has infiltrated people's lives. As I mentioned in my speech, many of these algorithms are feeding information to our kids that makes them hate others and, very worryingly, hate themselves. This is an area where we really need clear intervention.

I will also say, as I learned at our round table, it is important to recognize that there are circumstances in which the ability to have online access to good information and safe spaces can be life-saving for kids who are not safe at home. It is important that we have a balanced approach, which is why an expert regulator would be so critical in us getting this right as a country.

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I have been struggling with Bill C-34 since it was first introduced. I think the minister is terrific. I know the intent of the bill is great, but it is a lot of blank space. One part that really worries me is clause 85, which I will read. It is short. It says, "The purpose of a penalty is to promote compliance with this Act and not to punish."

In the case of criminal responsibility and people who have fallen on hard times, I do not think our criminal justice system should focus on punishment. In dealing with these corporations, I want to kill them. I would like to pull their corporate right. I am not acting as a policy wonk here. I am an enraged mother. I want to punish them. Why does this bill not suggest strict liability? Why does it not suggest that a CEO whose company engages in a proven harm, such as Amanda Todd's death, go to jail?

Danielle Martin: Madam Speaker, I think the member's enraged state reflects how many parents in this country feel. Of course we want to see tech giants held accountable. Particularly where catastrophic outcomes occur, there have to be appropriate consequences.

I do not know if we need to necessarily go as far as that, as killing the CEO, or whatever the member said, but the purpose of any regulation is—

● (2030)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): There is a point of order from the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. I believe she wants to make a correction.

Elizabeth May: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, I would like to clarify that, in law, the term would be "involuntary dissolution". A corporate entity is not a natural person, but it may get the powers of a natural person.

I am a pacifist. I do not want capital punishment for human beings. I want it for corporations.

Danielle Martin: Madam Speaker, I understand. All jest aside at this late hour of the evening, I think we all understood that the purpose of the member's question was to see corporations held accountable. That is what we all want.

The purpose of regulation is compliance. We have to be in a situation where companies are held to account and brought into compliance so that our kids can be safe online.

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, I thank my colleague from University—Rosedale for splitting her time with me.

A little less than a year ago, in December 2025, I visited the Hospital for Sick Children, or SickKids, as we know it in Toronto and across Canada. It has been called the world's best children's health care centre. It is 150 years old. That day last December, I met with seven researchers and pediatricians on staff. They are working as part of a new child health policy accelerator. It is an encounter that has stuck with me ever since. They told me what their number one concern for children's health was, which was not what I had expected standing in the wing of a children's hospital.

They sat me down and said their number one concern today was social media and the harms they were witnessing every day in the digital space. They were proverbially ringing the alarm on something they were witnessing with nearly every child, family and condition that came through their doors, whether it was childhood eating disorders, mental health, substance abuse, self-harm, cyber-bullying, cyber-hate, anxiety, sleep disorders or developmental impacts. This was the reality they described in having to open a dedicated clinic, the Lotus Health Clinic, to respond to the harms they were seeing from online child trafficking and grooming.

As a mother of three kids, I find that hard to hear. These are people who care for children through some of the most difficult moments of their lives. When they raise an alarm like that, we need to listen. Like any parent, I want all of our children to be healthy and happy. I want them to grow up feeling comfortable in themselves, have good friends and know they can find help when something is wrong. However, parents cannot see everything happening on a child's screen, and we cannot be expected to understand every algorithm deciding what appears there next.

In my work as Parliamentary Secretary to the Secretary of State for Children and Youth, I have met with youth organizations across the country and made young people's well-being a priority. I bring that responsibility and my perspective as a parent to this debate. The evidence that SickKids shared is clear. Its report cites a Canadian study in which 57% of children aged six to 10 had frequent exposure to social media. That is ages six to 10. We are talking about children in elementary school.

The consequences go beyond time spent on a device. SickKids points to survey findings that one in five teens has experienced bullying or harassment online, and 47% of young people aged 15 to 19 report negative experiences from social media use. Behind those numbers are children losing sleep, feeling anxious or carrying something frightening that they have not told anyone about.

A few days ago, SickKids and a group of organizations, including the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Paediatric Society and the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, launched a campaign for safer online spaces called Six Clicks. The campaign draws attention to how platforms are designed with features that push kids toward extreme or harmful content in six clicks or less. This is not accidental or serendipitous. It is deliberate. It is designed to capture attention. It is not about choice. It is about addiction and monetization.

Infinite scrolling, autoplay, push notifications, unsafe defaults, weak and hard-to-find safeguards, manipulative gaming and commercial features are the tactics that in almost any other consumer space, we would scrutinize and regulate. This is the reality our government is responding to with Bill C-34, the safe social media act.

Its starting point is straightforward: The global companies profiting from these services must take responsibility for the risks and the social harms that their products create. Canadian families and children cannot be left to carry that responsibility alone. That is what a duties-based approach means. It looks beyond an individual post to the systems that recommend it, amplify it and keep putting similar material in front of a child. The companies design those systems. They control how they work. They have the technical expertise and the resources to make them safer. This bill would give them a legal obligation, a duty, to do so.

● (2035)

We already expect safety to be part of the design of the products that children use or the advertising that they see. That expectation should extend to the digital environments where they spend so much of their lives. This bill would establish three core duties supported by transparency requirements.

First is a duty to act responsibly. Regulated social media services would have to reduce the risk of exposure to seven categories of harmful content, including bullying, sexual exploitation and content encouraging children to harm themselves. AI chatbot services would also have obligations tailored to their risks. When someone expresses suicidal thoughts, for example, a chatbot would have to interrupt the conversation and direct them to immediate human support.

Second is a duty to protect children with safeguards built into services and age-related protections. I will return to that in a moment. Third is a duty to make certain content inaccessible. Child sexual abuse material and intimate content shared without consent would have to be made inaccessible in Canada within 24 hours of being identified or flagged, subject to the bill's review process. Companies would also have to publish digital safety plans explaining what they are doing and whether their measures are working.

I want to focus on the duty to protect children, because this is where the bill speaks most directly to families. It would require certain social media services to prevent children under 16 from having accounts. A service could receive an exemption only if the independent commission was satisfied that it provides adequate safeguards for children. If a platform cannot make itself safe for children, it should not have children as customers. That is a clear expectation, and it is the company's responsibility to meet it.

Companies cannot be left to decide for themselves whether they have done enough. That has not worked, and it will not work. That is why this bill would establish an independent digital safety commission with the expertise to examine these systems and the authority to enforce the rules, review safety plans, investigate compliance and require companies to address failures. Significant financial penalties would give those obligations real consequences. For Canadians, that means having a public regulator working in their interests, able to demand answers from companies whose decisions affect their families and their children's health. That expertise matters, because technology does not stand still. A framework built only around today's platforms could be out of date before families feel its benefits.

The commission would help develop safety standards as risks evolve. The legislation also provides a process to extend child protection duties to additional categories of online services that pose significant risk to children. It is a modern response to a problem that countries around the world are confronting. It would give Canada the capacity to keep learning, to strengthen protections and to hold companies to their responsibilities as technology changes.

I keep coming back to that conversation with SickKids. When the people treating our children tell us that the digital environment is affecting their health, we have a responsibility to respond. We should be doing everything we can to prevent those harms before a child needs treatment. Parents will keep having the difficult conversations, teachers will keep supporting their students and doctors will keep caring for children who need help, but they do need us to do our part, and the companies creating these risks must be required to do theirs. For too long, they have ignored this problem and they have shied away from the obligations that are so obviously theirs.

Our children deserve time to grow, confidence in who they are and a childhood that puts their well-being first. This bill is necessary and it is urgent, and I urge all members in the House to support Bill C-34.

● (2040)

Grant Jackson (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, I think my colleague has been listening to some of the speeches of my colleagues who have spoken on the bill, and Conservatives are questioning why so many of the details on the powers of the commission would be left to regulation. Why cannot that be outlined in Parliament so that parliamentarians, duly elected members of this place, can have a say in the powers of a commission that would ultimately have significant authority over the lives of Canadians online? I wonder if that member can say whether she has heard those concerns. Does she think that the government will address them?

Leslie Church: Madam Speaker, I have heard those concerns raised, but where I come down on this issue is believing we need action today. We need a commission that is going to be flexible, that is going to be able to adapt to the way technology is changing in front of our eyes right now. If we wait to get that just perfect, if we wait to hammer out all of those details, the technology, the platforms will continue to move and there will be gaps we do not anticipate today that are going to be on our children's screens tomorrow. This is why this framework is necessary, and we are not alone in the world in pursuing this course. There are countries across the EU, across the G7 and G20 that are pursuing this as well, that are looking towards this type of framework. We are on the right track.

Karim Bardeesy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's speech; she has so much commitment and expertise on this issue. I am wondering if she could expound on a point she made in her speech around the inability or the unwillingness of companies that have been faced with these issues, the research in front of them and the increasingly concerning effects being caused by their technologies. I wonder if she can describe in fuller detail what it is that is preventing them from acting and why government action is necessary.

Leslie Church: Madam Speaker, over the last 15, nearly 20 years that we have been living in a digital world, from YouTube to the iPhone to the social media that we know today, such as Facebook and Twitter. Platforms have been evolving. What we do know consistently is that they have been evolving and growing in a way that is designed to create attention, that is designed to create addiction, that is designed to create clicks and likes. Platforms know this. We have had variations of this debate at different times in the last 15 years. For things like figuring out how to take down content quickly, we know that many of these companies have had to stand up thousands of employees to do that work, but they are shirking their responsibilities to do it quickly and to address all the different types of harmful content that we know they know are out there.

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I want to get back to the point I was making to the member for University—Rosedale. I do not think we disagree in this place that the companies that are producing the hazardous product of so-called online services on what they call platforms are way smarter than any bureaucrat and way smarter than anyone drafting this legislation. This is their playground. They know what they are doing with algorithms. They know how they are making addictive content to keep people scrolling, whether it is seniors or children.

How do we create a maximum incentive for the producer of the hazardous product to keep our children safe? This bill would not do that. This bill says the penalty is to encourage compliance with this vague law. It does not say we can drive them out of business if they harm our children.

Leslie Church: Madam Speaker, the bill would make provisions for penalties in this scheme, and the companies have an interest in having their products in market. We want to make sure those products are safe, so if they are designed safely and if they meet the test the commission would set out, then we are going to feel much more reassured about their presence inside our digital borders. We definitely know there are multiple tracks at play here. We are seeing this in the United States. We are seeing it in Europe. We are seeing it even with the school boards in Ontario, which are taking many of these companies to court. I would offer my colleague across the way some hope that there are going to be multiple pathways we can look to in order to ensure that these companies are truly held liable for the social costs of the products they have put in all of our houses.

● (2045)

Grant Jackson (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for King—Vaughan.

I am proud to rise today on behalf of my constituents in Brandon—Souris to speak to Bill C-34, the safe social media act. As a member of gen Z, I am among the few parliamentarians who grew up with smart phones at school and social media becoming part of everyday life. I got my first phone at age 12, the LG Rumour with a slide-out keyboard. We thought we were very cool.

I then got my first smart phone at age 14, and entered high school with the rest of my cohort into the brave unknown of teenagers on social media for the first time and it certainly was the unknown. There were Snapchat messages in class and Instagram notifications constantly. This was long before the algorithms and ad campaigns got to today's level of sophistication. It really was the Wild West.

While there were certainly some positive features, there was also a dark side that every young person has seen. While we saw it, and young people continue to see it minute by minute, hour by hour, parents often do not. Their algorithms, understandably, just look a lot different. If they do see it, there is very little they can do about it.

A parent can put a phone away at supper and make sure homework comes first. They can attempt to confiscate it at bedtime. However, regardless of breaks, they cannot rewrite the software that decides what their child sees or personally remove an image someone else has shared. They cannot control a predator who has mastered what it sounds like to imitate the voice and speech of a young person in order to lure kids in.

That is the challenge facing all families across the country and that is why Conservatives believe children should be protected online, technology companies should be held accountable and parents should have the tools to keep their children safe. Those principles are clear, but whether Bill C-34 would actually deliver on them is the real question before us today.

Kids are still figuring out who they are. They are learning how to handle pressure and how to separate what is real from what is not. That is difficult enough without constant comparison, online cruelty and a stream of content designed to keep them watching. An embarrassing moment at school used to be something someone could leave behind when they went home, but today that same moment can be recorded and shared with hundreds or thousands of people and follow someone everywhere. A cruel message can be shared long after the day ends, and for a young person being targeted online, putting the phone down does not erase the fear of what everyone else might have seen or might be saying.

Most concerning is a place where predators have far too much access to young people with zero accountability. In 2024, police across Canada reported almost 17,000 incidents of online child sexual exploitation, and StatsCan warns that police-reported figures likely underestimate the full scope of the problem.

The government is right to acknowledge it. Parents are worried. They know their children's strengths, worries and maturity levels better than anyone else, but a child sitting quietly in their bedroom may be dealing with something that a parent cannot see. Taking harm seriously means being willing to examine this problem and the government's proposed position clearly. Parents deserve more than assurances from a tech company, and they deserve to know exactly what the government intends to do about this problem.

Bill C-34 claims to impose new safety standards on social media and AI chatbot services, and establish a digital safety commission to oversee a framework. However, many of the most important details are being left for future regulations. Here enters our concern. The bill says companies must introduce design features to protect children. What does that mean in practice? Will it change the algorithms that recommend harmful content or the endless scrolling that keeps kids watching? We do not know yet. This is something my constituents are concerned about.

In a recent mailer, I asked the people of Westman their thoughts on this bill and whether, in general, kids should be banned from social media. A constituent named Jack, who opposes a ban, wrote to me and said, “Companies just need to be held accountable for the manufactured algorithms they run. Don't ban kids.” Many others agree and I think that is an important point.

Parents can set limits at home, but they cannot control the content that these algorithms push onto their children's screens. That responsibility has to rest with the companies designing and operating these platforms. Will the regulations under Bill C-34 actually change how those companies operate? Will they simply be required to file a safety plan with the government and carry on?

● (2050)

Bill C-34 also aims to give this commission the substantial powers to investigate companies, enforce compliance and impose penalties. Cabinet and the commission would each have regulation-making powers within the framework to determine what that compliance and those penalties are, not Parliament. I understand the need to move quickly and to hold technology companies accountable, but how can Parliament judge whether these powers are appropriate when we have not seen so many of the rules that would govern their use?

Consider a parent who discovers, in the words of this legislation, that an intimate image of their child has been shared without consent, perhaps even generated by AI. Their priority is to get it taken down as quickly as possible. The bill claims to have a process for removing specified content, generally within 24 hours after it is identified or properly flagged, although future regulations could change those criteria, but even if they are not, 24 hours on the Internet is a long time. What happens if the platform rejects the complaint? If those 24 hours pass and the image is still up, does that family now have to go through another complaints process with the commission, all while the image continues to spread? If the platform simply fails to act, what consequences would it actually face? A parent in Brandon—Souris should not need a lawyer to navigate this system. We need to know that these protections will work in the real world in real time and not just on paper.

This brings me to the proposed restriction on social media accounts for children under 16. Ronald, a constituent from Brandon, supported a ban, raising concerns about how easily children can encounter harmful content online, but he also made an important point. He wrote that parents would need to be a willing partner if this were to succeed. I could not agree more. We can pass all the legislation in Ottawa we like, but parents are still the ones raising their children and helping them navigate the online world. Kids are primarily their responsibility, far more than the government's.

That raises a very practical question: How would this proposed restriction actually work based on what is in the bill? The bill provides for age checks on social media services designated through regulations with possible exemptions for platforms that have “adequate safeguards”. What does “adequate” mean? By whose definition is it adequate? Is it the parents' definition of an adequate safety plan for their kids, or would it be the commission's or the government's? We do not know, because so much of these decisions would be left to regulation after the bill has passed.

Putting an age restriction into practice also means finding a way to verify people's ages, and that raises another serious concern: the privacy of Canadians and the security of their personal information. If platforms must check people's ages, how will they do it? Will Canadians be asked for government ID, a facial scan or information collected by an outside company? The bill does not include safeguards requiring information collected for age checks to be protected, used only for that purpose and destroyed afterwards. Who will collect the data? How will we know that it has been deleted? What happens if there is a breach? We only know from highly reputable organizations, like Crime Stoppers very recently, that the threat of a data breach is a very real possibility in today's day and age. Once that sensitive personal info has been compromised, a promise to delete it later offers little comfort. Parents should not have to trade one concern about their child's safety for another concern about their child's personal information.

After speaking with parents in Westman, I know they want their children to make friends, learn about the world and become independent enough to make good decisions, but most of all, they want their kids to be safe. Tech can be a tool, but it can also be a path to things that no child should face alone.

As the bill proceeds through second reading, Parliament must remain focused on two things: holding powerful tech companies accountable without handing the Liberals a blank cheque on oversight, and, most importantly, protecting children by empowering, not replacing, parents. Conservatives will continue to fight for those priorities until we get this legislation right. The consequences are too significant for anything less.

● (2055)

Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague brought up a lot of questions and hypotheticals. He criticized the use of regulation, which is a normal process in this House. He seemed to have a lot more questions than an actual position on or insights into the legislation. Will he be supporting this bill, yes or no?

Grant Jackson: Madam Speaker, I am not sure why the member is offended that an opposition member is asking questions of the government. That is how Parliament works. Nonetheless, I think Conservatives have been clear that we support, in principle, protecting kids online. We are looking for more details. Perhaps some of the Liberal members will put more of the teeth of this bill on the record now so that Conservatives can assess it before it comes to a vote.

Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Madam Speaker, the important thing we have to understand today is that we are concerned about the future of this country. If we do not protect our children, we will not have a future for them. That is what we are looking for. We are looking to protect our children, and I think my colleague did a wonderful job of explaining that.

What do you think we need to do to ensure that—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): I will remind the hon. member that I do not think anything.

Anna Roberts: Madam Speaker, I apologize.

What can we do to ensure that tech companies take accountability in protecting the future of our country?

Grant Jackson: Madam Speaker, that was an important question. There are ways that tighter strings could be attached to how tech companies run their algorithms, what they are like based on the platforms they are delivered on, and what they look like compared to, for example, the data plans on the devices that kids use to access these platforms and the Internet.

Those are just a couple of examples off the top of my head where this bill could more tightly restrict what kids with kid plans on any of our networks are seeing. We do not see that in the bill, unfortunately. Hopefully the government will make some amendments and improve the bill.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.): Madam Speaker, right now we are addressing the very important topic of child protection. I am the father of a 12-year-old daughter.

I would like to ask my colleague a question concerning the regulation of AI chatbots. How do members propose to protect young people from the risks associated with AI chatbots, especially their ability to reinforce behaviours harmful to our children?

[*English*]

Grant Jackson: Madam Speaker, we do not have to look very far, sadly, to see the tragic consequences of what unregulated AI chatbots can do and the damage they can do to the mental health of a young person. There are ways the government could legislate what ability chatbots could have to give advice on specific topics, like, for example, atrocities in public places, mental health issues and suicide. I hate to use that word, but there are ways the government could regulate that through legislation. We are not seeing this bill do that, because the government is leaving it all, apparently, for the commission to decide on after the bill is passed. We would like to see some stricter provisions put into law rather than being left up to the commission, whoever that is going to be, somewhere, someday down the road.

● (2100)

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it seems that Conservative Party members are talking about the problem. We have a good understanding of the problem. That is why we have Bill C-34. It is there to protect the interests of children in Canada.

Does the member support the principle of having the legislation go to committee?

Grant Jackson: Madam Speaker, I think I made that clear in my speech. If the member for Winnipeg North was not listening, yes, I absolutely recognize the problem and support, in principle, addressing the serious problem of the kids' mental health crisis online and the problem of social media companies exploiting kids through their exploitative algorithms.

That is an answer to the member's question. He is shaking his head.

Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am rising today to address an issue that has been on the minds of concerned parents both in King—Vaughan and across this country. In this increasingly digital and connected world, it has become more important than ever to ensure that our children are able to access the Internet in a safe manner that is beneficial to their well-being. We are at a tipping point where access to age-inappropriate content and increasingly addictive social media algorithms run the risk of corrupting the minds of our youth and damaging their mental health.

Canadian parents are well-meaning and, as we all do, want the absolute best for their children. Parents are seeing the effects that unfiltered access to all corners of the Internet can have on their children in real time. They are overwhelmed and are trying their best to keep their children safe from online harms, but many feel that they are fighting a losing battle and need help.

What are average parents supposed to do to keep up with the rapid development and progress made by big tech companies, making all forms of content more and more accessible online? The statistics on online harm that children are exposed to are staggering. Twenty-five per cent of Canadian youth between the ages of 12 and 17 have reported experiencing cyber-bullying, which is correlated with a number of serious mental health considerations for our youth, who are already struggling. Police reported an increase in the sexual exploitation of children online of 347% between 2014 and 2024, a figure that both stuns us and fills us with disgust.

We have seen real-world examples of the impact that these figures have in the country. The heartbreaking example of Amanda Todd some years ago, who tragically died by suicide following sexual exploitation and cyber-bullying on online, is especially important to this discussion. It is critical that we give her and other young people like her justice.

Our youth are living more and more digitally forward lives and, in the vast majority of cases, are more tech-conscious than their well-intentioned parents. However, having technological capability does not necessarily mean they are safe from vulnerability.

One of the benefits of growing older is growing wiser and knowing when someone is trying to take advantage of us. Social media algorithms are specifically targeted to keep us engaged and take advantage of our addiction to their apps. These digital world interactions can have real-world consequences for our youth, whether that comes in the form of cyber-bullying, sexual exploitation, content that imposes unrealistic and damaging body image standards, or exposure to violence and pornography.

I am a mother and a grandmother. I know first-hand how important it is to protect and provide for our children. I know what it is like to want our children to have a better life than we had and to prepare them as best as possible for life's many challenges. Parents today are in an increasingly difficult situation, and I worry about the future of my own grandchildren. I want my grandchildren to have a social and fulfilling life, not one in which their self-worth is determined by what they see and read on social media.

As parents, we can set all the guardrails and house rules on technology we want, but we can only do so much to fully protect them, especially when removing devices and removing all access are not an option. What then? What can we do to protect our kids? As legislators, we have a unique and profound responsibility to give parents all the tools that we as parliamentarians can. We also have the unique ability to provide those tools.

● (2105)

Parents know what is best for their children and should be empowered when making decisions in their children's best interest. We cannot expect them to do all the work in keeping their kids safe. These parents are asking for our help. As legislators, we need to comply.

A survey by Angus Reid showed that 75% of Canadians, and 70% of Canadians whose children live in the home, are in support of a ban on social media use for youth under 16, but 72% of Canadians believe parents should hold the primary responsibility for regulating the social media use in accordance with their own parenting policies.

Parliament should not tell parents how to raise their children, but Parliament should be involved in helping parents keep their children safe on the Internet. We need to ensure that whatever the House puts forward in terms of solutions is effective and minimally restrictive on the freedoms of Canadians. We need to ensure that whatever is put forward does not have the unintended effect of forcing children into spaces that are even more unregulated, unmonitored and dangerous. We need to hold technology companies accountable for what children have access to on their platforms, and we need to work with them to ensure that protection of children is at the forefront of their internal policies.

How can we make sure that any future policy actually requires that technology companies take responsibility for our children's safety on their apps and does not simply keep them chained to social media to generate more revenue? There need to be strong penalties for a corporation that fails to protect our children, and Parliament needs to ensure that the relevant authorities are empowered to enforce these penalties.

We have seen the results of some similar legislation in other Commonwealth countries, like Australia and the United Kingdom. In Australia, for example, restrictions on Internet usage did not have a strong effect on access. As of three months after the bill was passed, 70% of children kept accessing the Internet and their accounts, and there was no reduction in reports of online harm.

What can we, as legislators, do to make sure that any legislation in Canada will actually make a difference? Kids are tech-savvy, and they will find the bypasses if we let them. VPNs, or virtual private networks, are often used to bypass age- or location-based restrictions, and statistics in countries with this kind of legislation show that VPN usage has gone up considerably. How can our legislation address this? Is it within our power to curtail VPN usage if the bill is passed?

How are we going to actually enforce age-based restrictions on certain content? Other comparable legislative bodies have required submission of government-issued ID. What would this mean for the privacy concerns of Canadians, who would be placing their sensitive personal information in the hands of a private corporation, many of which may not even be based in Canada? What are they supposed to do when there is a data breach and their information is released to all kinds of bad actors?

One thing is certain, which is that the legislation will need a great deal of scrutiny and careful consideration, which Parliament should be equipped and prepared for. The Conservative Party wants nothing more than to keep Canadian children safe, healthy and strong. Conservatives in the House will do everything they can to ensure that any future legislation protects kids from cyber-bullying, social media addiction, explicit content, sexual exploitation and bad actors online while also empowering parents to retain their decision-making power and protecting the privacy interests and freedoms of all Canadians.

● (2110)

Will Greaves (Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a pretween daughter, and there is a very real conversation that happens in our school, with the parents in our school community, about who is going to give their child a cell phone first because when that one parent gives that one tween-age child a phone, it creates the desire for this object among all of the other students and puts incredible pressure on us parents, so much so that we wish the school would simply ban the use of these devices so that individual parents would not have either the burden of monitoring their child's social media and Internet use or the social pressure to keep up with the Joneses and the latest technology, etc.

I wonder if the hon. member for King—Vaughan would agree, as a mother and a grandmother, as she said, that some of these decisions are actually made easier for parents and for families when they are taken at the collective level. When a school or an institution such as government makes an evidence-based, rational decision, that makes a standard common to everybody and relieves parents of the individual responsibility of having to make that unpopular decision that their son or daughter cannot have a phone.

Anna Roberts: Madam Speaker, that is actually a really good question. Here is the situation. All kids want to have what the other children have. We know that. It is part of nature. However, one thing that we have to really understand is that we need to hold these big tech companies responsible.

I am going to tell a sad story. I met with a mother whose child is autistic and was groomed through the Internet. The mother found her daughter five years later. The daughter had to go through multiple surgeries. She is now on suicide watch. That all happened through the Internet, through a social media platform. I do not want that to be anyone else's child. It is our responsibility to make sure that those innocent, vulnerable children are kept safe.

Grant Jackson (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Madam Speaker, elaborating on that very tragic story that my colleague just raised, I wonder if she feels that the bill in its current format would prevent that situation from happening again. Do we know enough about the bill to make that judgment yet?

Anna Roberts: Madam Speaker, I think what we need to do is sit down as parliamentarians in committee, go over the bill line by line, and find ways that we can ensure that these tech companies become responsible and are accountable to protect our children. Without our children, this country has no future.

Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am a bit confused by both members opposite who spoke on the issues. We have a slew of different bills. We have Bill C-36, we passed Bill C-16, we have Bill C-25, and of course there is Bill C-34, which we are debating today. This a series of bills that really look for ways to protect Canadians when it comes to young people and when it comes to all Canadians. These four bills really look for ways to protect Canadians.

I was hoping the member could reflect on any of those bills to see if they align with anything that she has mentioned today and if there is support for any of those four bills that I just mentioned.

● (2115)

Anna Roberts: Madam Speaker, I know the Scarborough area well. I would ask the member how he would explain that to Amanda Todd's mother. Amanda Todd's mother right now is grieving the loss of her daughter. We could protect those children, but we have a responsibility as parliamentarians and as parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, mothers and fathers to work to ensure that these tech companies become just as accountable as parents if we want the future of this country to continue to be prosperous.

Shannon Miedema (Halifax, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for New Westminster—Burnaby—Maillardville.

I rise today in support of Bill C-34, the safe social media act.

I will begin by sharing that I am a mother of three children, ages 10, 13 and 16. I, like all parents, am keenly aware of the risks of social media, and I understand the difficulties of regulating its use by our children and our youth. Even though I feel fairly confident that my kids are generally well protected, I cannot be sure, because parenting alone is not enough to protect our children.

Many parents do not want their children on social media at a young age, but it is incredibly difficult to keep them away when all of their friends are online. It can be a major source of family tension and stress, to say the least. This is not a failure of parenting. We want what is best for our children, and a large part of that is ensuring that they are not isolated from their peer groups. It is also important to recognize the ease at which these services are accessed. Often without their parents' knowledge, children are entering the digital world, and with only a few clicks, they can create an account and begin using platforms that may contain harmful content and expose them to dangerous actors at an early age.

A World Health Organization study found that more than one in 10 adolescents showed signs of problematic social media behaviour, struggling to control their use and experiencing negative consequences. Notably, this report also included the following call to action: “Ensure social media platforms enforce age restrictions and create a regulatory framework encouraging responsible design of digital tools for young users.” With the introduction of Bill C-34, this is exactly what we are aiming to do.

The bill covers both aspects of that call to action. It would create a nationwide restriction on social media services for Canadians under the age of 16 and implement three core duties for social media services. The duty to act responsibly would require regulated services to assess and mitigate risks linked to harmful content. The duty to protect children would require services to build age-appropriate safeguards into the design and operation of their products. The duty to make certain content inaccessible would require faster removal action on the most serious victimizing content: child sexual exploitation material and intimate content posted without consent.

Technology is ever-adapting, and our legislation must reflect that. Online harms are intensifying, and our laws have not kept pace. Protecting our kids from the harms of social media is a responsibility that I know we all share. The digital world connects us, it educates us, and it drives our economy. Unfortunately, it has also become a space where too many children are exposed to preventable harm.

A study co-led by researchers at the University of Alberta found that spending more time on social media is making Canadian teenagers, especially girls, feel anxious, depressed and disconnected. The results showed that just one extra hour of daily device use was linked to a 15% higher chance of moderate to severe depression, along with a nearly 13% higher likelihood of similar levels of anxiety. This is not just a concern for parents at home. This has societal implications that go beyond one child and one family. That is why it is our responsibility to act to address these rising trends.

We are also seeing a rise in dangerous behaviour being presented online, and without effective safeguards in place, our children are subject to observing, internalizing and repeating these behaviours. A report released by Stats Canada in 2024 found that one in eight young people saw online content daily that could incite hate or violence. A study from the Canadian Centre for Child Protection found that 50% of youth had watched the Charlie Kirk assassination video, while 33% had seen videos of mass or school shootings. Despite these high rates of exposure, only a small minority said they had actively searched for that content. Instead, most said that the content frequently appears unexpectedly in posts by strangers or in algorithmic platform recommendations.

● (2120)

There is an unfortunate connection between viewing this sort of content and repeating it in real life. The same report from Statistics Canada found that more than a third of people suspected of cyber-related hate crimes were between the ages of 12 and 17. The harms being perpetrated online are not being left on the screen. They are being translated into real-life actions in our schools, in our homes and in our communities. Moving past the physical violence, these harms extend into sexualized violence and graphic content. Statistics from the Canadian Centre for Child Protection show that 10% of Canadian youth reported exposure to child sexual abuse material, while 13% had seen a video of adults being sexually abused. Anything above 0% is completely unacceptable, in my view.

The reality is that there has been endless research done that showcases a clear link between social media use in adolescents and mental health concerns, rising hate and sexual violence. This research is well documented and well studied. It has been presented with the backing of parental safety organizations, our world-class research institutions and even tech companies.

This topic was first brought to my attention when similar legislation was presented in my home province of Nova Scotia by Iain Rankin, member of the legislative assembly for Timberlea-Prospect and the interim leader of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party. In presenting his piece of legislation at the provincial level, he started a conversation that introduced me to the work of Jenna Poste, a tech executive by trade and founder of the Nova Scotia chapter of Unplugged Canada. Jenna and the team at Unplugged Canada have been advocating for this sort of action for years. Jenna spoke at a press conference where she highlighted a point that I made in my speech earlier, which is that many parents do not want their children to have a presence on social media, but when that comes at the cost of social ostracization, it sometimes becomes too difficult to make that decision and enforce it.

The most common criticism I have heard since this bill was first tabled in the spring is that the government has no place in parenting. I agree, but the government does have a responsibility to step in when it comes to matters of public safety. Canada does not have to reinvent the wheel. Similar laws have been passed in a number of jurisdictions around the world, including Australia, Norway, Spain and Greece. Even provinces such as Manitoba are also looking at taking matters into their own hands at a provincial level.

I also want to present a historic comparison with regard to opposition to matters regarding public safety. In 1984, when Nova Scotia was implementing its mandatory seat belt legislation, it came with much public outrage and scrutiny. In my research regarding Bill C-34, I found an archived CTV interview with people who were opposed, in which a Nova Scotian justified that opposition by calling the legislation “something that infringes on the petty details of the organization and conduct of people's lives.” I feel quite confident that if we ask most Canadians today, they will recognize that seat belt laws are appropriate measures to protect our citizens, and I feel quite confident that 42 years from now, this legislation would be met with the same wide-reaching opinion.

As we continue to debate on this important legislation, I urge my fellow members to consider the public safety concerns I have presented today and remember the full range of regulations that exist within this piece of legislation that would not only protect our children but also provide sufficient opportunities for social media platforms to implement necessary safeguards, because the safety of our children must be our top priority and should not and cannot be a responsibility left to parents alone.

The digital environment is not safe for children. Leading health authorities now warn we cannot say that social media is sufficiently safe for young people and that governments must act decisively to reduce these risks. We are proposing this legislation because it is our responsibility to act, to act now and to act with urgency.

● (2125)

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, my hon. friend clearly put a lot of time, research and thought into sharing her ideas.

I want to ask about one aspect of the concept of the age restriction. When this bill was initially tabled, I think the general impression of the bill had been that it would establish a required minimum age for access to social media, but upon subsequent review, it seems that the bill would not actually do that. It would require social media companies to incorporate certain design features in order to be able to offer youth accounts. Effectively, it would not really be an age ban. Rather, it would require certain design features before companies can offer youth accounts.

I wonder, in the interest of clarity for members of the House and the public, if the member can clarify whether she considers that the bill would be an age ban or not.

Shannon Miedema: Madam Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on his upcoming additional child, number seven. It is fantastic news.

My understanding is that we are looking at age 16 and over as the appropriate age for being responsible and mature enough to navigate social media. The more important thing would be requiring the platforms profiting off our youth to do the work to make sure they are protected. In whatever ways that needs to happen, we need to make sure we are providing a safe online environment for our children, whether they be 10 years, 16 years or five years old. It is is really important and worth investigation.

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I thought the analogy to seat belt legislation was particularly useful. We are talking about an inherently dangerous product in what is available online and the threat it poses to our children. This is really not unlike consumer protection legislation. It is not unlike what we do with other dangerous products in terms of regulation. We really want to be able to lower the boom on a corporation, just as we did, for instance, on ones that made cars at the time but did not put in seat belts once that was regulated and required.

Would the hon. member be interested, as I am, in figuring out how we could amend this legislation to create the maximum incentive on the corporate tech billionaires and trillionaires to make them see that Canada is not a good place to do business if they are going to harm children, and that the penalties would scare the hell out of them?

Shannon Miedema: Madam Speaker, I agree wholeheartedly that a lot of what we are aiming to do is put the responsibility properly on those who are profiting from these online platforms and to put guardrails in place so we do not have the terrible incidents we have seen in the past in this country and across the world. That is exactly what we are aiming to do.

Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.): Madam Speaker, legislation is of course important, but there are many roles that society can play. When it comes to parents, guardians, next door neighbours, faith groups, educators and community-based organizations, many people can play a role in making sure we provide young people with the skills and tools they need.

I would like to know from the member if she has put some thought into different ways in which parents and other members of society can play a role to really help tackle this huge challenge we have in front of us.

Shannon Miedema: Madam Speaker, a big thing I think about often is getting our children outside, getting them out of doors and connected to real people in three dimensions, in real time and in nature. I have seen, even with my children, that if they have too much screen time, the behaviour starts to get a little wonky. They start to fight with me, my other kids and my husband. When we all get out of the house and go for a walk, we reset. It is really important for kids to have, as they are growing up, a sense of community, whether that is a religious community, a neighbourhood community or an activity community. We gravitate to those supports, and the more we can do to get our kids and youth off screens and actually engaged in the world around us, the better we will be.

Jake Sawatzky (New Westminster—Burnaby—Maillardville, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today I rise to speak to Bill C-34, the safe social media act.

We have been hearing a lot about the duty to act responsibly, the duty to protect children, and the duty to make certain content inaccessible. When we talk about protecting our next generation, we have to talk about the digital world they are growing up in. Even as one of the youngest MPs of the House, and the youngest member of Parliament for British Columbia, I belong to a generation that experienced a full childhood before social media became part of our everyday lives. I remember a time when, after school, I would catch up with friends meeting them in person. If we wanted to talk to somebody, we picked up the land line and hoped they were home. I spent time outdoors biking with my friends to the corner store, skateboarding, playing tag and making memories away from a screen.

Today is a bit of a different world, of course. Children are growing up in an environment where social media is always within reach. Endless scrolling really is endless. Instead of simply catching up with friends, they can find themselves spending hours online, caught in addictive algorithms designed to keep them scrolling for many hours. There are concerns about what they are exposed to, how online platforms influence their behaviour, and what happens to their mental health as they grow up spending more time on their phone.

There are ways to mitigate this, of course. Consider YouTube, for example, which has been a bit of a leader in this space. It allows users and parents to turn off endless scrolling in the settings, to limit the addictive nature and the endless scrolling that many kids are growing up with these days. This is an example of the options we want our social media platforms to allow as settings.

We cannot expect our children to navigate these challenges on their own. Protecting young people means taking a serious look at how these platforms are operating and the responsibility they have to the children who use them. Social media does create opportunities for people to connect, to explore, to learn and to express themselves, but we cannot ignore the risks that come with it, especially when it comes to their mental health and personal safety.

Algorithms can amplify harmful content and expose young people to unrealistic standards, which they see day in and day out. For some people, this can contribute to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and feelings of isolation. All these have been on the rise, as reported by psychologists, especially in younger age groups, which are using these technologies on a very frequent basis. At the same time, online platforms can also expose users to cyber-bullying, harassment, exploitation and other harmful content that can have very serious real-world consequences.

In 2025, 23% of Canadian youth aged 16 to 24 reported spending almost one-third of their day on social media. Research has associated longer screen times with poorer mental health indicators, including higher levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress, as well as reports of suicidal ideation. This matters because protecting young Canadians is about making sure the digital world does not come at the expense of their well-being or their relationships with others. Young people need supportive environments where they can build meaningful connections and access help when they need it.

We also have to recognize the role that social media platforms play in shaping what young people see online. Algorithms influence the content they are exposed to, and recommendation systems can repeatedly push harmful material onto someone's screen. For a young person already struggling with their mental health, repeated exposure to harmful content can create additional risks. Over time, this can normalize very dangerous behaviours and make it harder for young people to seek help.

It is crucial that online platforms take greater responsibility to ensure that their algorithms prioritize safety and well-being, especially for vulnerable users. It is also very important that the social media giants that are monetizing the attention span of our next generation be held accountable for the harms they are causing, and that our legislation have teeth to enforce consequences for the social media companies that are providing these harms to our youth.

I will soon be introducing my own private member's bill, which is a national strategy for suicide prevention. Of course, one of the main things it is also looking at is what some of the risk factors are for suicide, which is unfortunately all too common in our modern day and age.

● (2130)

It is an unfortunate reality that there is content on social media that can sometimes propagate tendencies toward self-harm and toward suicidal ideation. It is very important that it is not just up to parents to regulate the things their kids are seeing and to be the police of the content their kids are taking in. That is why it is up to us as government to do that.

We need to ask ourselves this: Is it fair to expect parents to manage these risks on their own while the companies designing these platforms face limited accountability? Parents are already balancing the pressures of everyday life. We cannot expect them to monitor everything that their children do 24 hours a day, particularly when kids have their own screens. We cannot constantly see everything that our kids are seeing. It is, frankly, impossible. Parents have an important role to play, of course, by setting up certain settings on devices, but protecting children cannot fall on their shoulders alone.

Social media companies design these platforms. They design how content is recommended and how users interact with these services. That is why we need clear expectations for these companies. They must take meaningful steps to identify risks and reduce harm. Just as importantly, they must be transparent about what they are doing and demonstrate that their efforts are making a difference. Canadians should not have to simply take a company's word that a platform is safe.

Technology has moved faster than the rules to protect our people are keeping up. We have been slow to respond to these changing online environments, and we need to take action. As a result, harmful content can spread unchecked, and dangerous behaviours can be amplified. Vulnerable users can repeatedly be exposed to materials that put their well-being at risk.

Bill C-34 takes an important step toward closing that gap by recognizing that those who design and profit from these platforms also have a responsibility to prevent foreseeable harms, the harms that they know they are causing. We should not wait for a young person to experience harm before expecting action from the companies that operate these services.

The legislation would establish clear expectations from social media platforms. Companies would be required to assess the risks associated with harmful content on their services and take proactive steps to reduce those risks. Users would have access to a clear reporting and complaint mechanism so they know where to turn when they encounter harmful content or have concerns for their own safety. It is important that we make sure this happens with a very quick process, because throughout this, we do not want to see young people turn away from platforms that we are familiar with and go toward corners of the Internet that might be less regulated. That is why it is important that the legislation move quickly. If we stand these things up, we can prevent people from going to less safe corners of the Internet.

● (2135)

Another factor here is, of course, the new challenges emerging with artificial intelligence. AI has made it easier to create fake or manipulated images that damage someone's reputation. Some content can go viral within minutes. It can also make it much harder for people to distinguish between authentic content and material designed to mislead them. We have now entered an age where when we see a photo, it is virtually impossible to tell if that photo is real or if it has been generated in a matter of seconds by somebody on a keyboard anywhere on the planet.

AI chatbots raise additional concerns, particularly when they interact with young people who are experiencing emotional distress. These interactions feel very personal, and young users may not always understand the limitations of these systems. We need appropriate safeguards to reduce the risk of harmful responses and ensure that vulnerable young people are not left without proper support.

Take the example of somebody using an AI chatbot as a counsellor, for example. These chatbots are not registered counsellors and can sometimes give very misleading and harmful advice to the young people who are using them. Some government oversight is very needed here. We cannot wait until harm has already occurred before asking how these technologies should be used responsibly. Platforms must take responsibility for the risks associated with the services they provide, including the AI tools that they make available to their users.

● (2140)

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, my hon. friend spent a lot of time talking about the problem, and I completely agree with his description of the problem. There is going to be no disagreement in the House that we have a serious problem with what happens online and the effects it has on young people, that we need action and that this action has to include real accountability for platforms and actors for the things they are responsible for. The work we will do at committee on this bill specifically will be to study the government's proposed solution to see whether it is fit for purpose.

One of the questions I have, I asked earlier, and I wonder if the member has thoughts on it. The bill does not appear to be an age ban, which was initially proposed. I think it proposes to require certain adaptations or changes to design features, ultimately with the idea that the social media platforms that exist could continue to offer youth accounts. There would not be a requirement, for instance, for parental consent for those youth accounts.

Can the member tell me whether my reading of the legislation is correct, or does he see the bill as being an age ban, as some have proposed?

Jake Sawatzky: Madam Speaker, it is very important that in this process, we make sure that these platforms are fit for young people to be on them. If they are deemed fit for use, then of course that is great and youth will be allowed to continue to use them. However, if there are platforms that are deemed to not be taking these measures, then there will be a ban until they are. It is an age ban particularly for the platforms that have the most severe consequences.

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, there is something of a lovely age gap between the member for New Westminster—Burnaby—Maillardville and I, and it is with a sense of generational continuity that I address him. Our first conversation was about how his best friend was the grandson of one of my very best friends. This is one of those things where some of us have more familiarity with social media than others.

I want to ask a question following up on the question from my friend from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan.

We do not really have an age ban in the bill. I think all of us are united in wanting to protect children from online harms, but my current fixation is what we could fix through amendments to this bill. We could create incentives for corporations to protect children in Canada, saying that otherwise, they would suffer significant and crushing financial or personal punishment. They would then be highly incentivized to make sure their platforms do not harm our children. Does the member have any thoughts on that?

Jake Sawatzky: Madam Speaker, I would like to first off thank my hon. colleague for the question. I would also like to say hi to Walker and Pam Jennings, with whom we share a mutual friendship.

I agree with my hon. colleague that this legislation needs to have teeth. We, of course, are talking about very large social media giants, and a slap on the wrist would not be enough for enforcement. We need to make sure we have penalties, particularly for the worst cases and worst offences. These are things too horrible to even talk about, but when we talk about about sexualized deepfakes of children, for example, they must be removed in a very swift manner, and if not, there need to be consequences for the social media giants.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government has an essential role to play in protecting children and keeping them safe while respecting parental authority. The goal is to strike a balance between protecting children and respecting parents' responsibilities.

Can my colleague explain how this bill would help speed up the removal of intimate content distributed without consent and content that sexually victimizes children, in order to better protect them?

● (2145)

Jake Sawatzky: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his excellent question. It is important for social networks to ensure that this type of content, which is harmful, is removed within an acceptable time period.

[*English*]

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a real honour for me tonight to join what is a very important and substantial conversation about how we protect our kids in the age of the Internet. Obviously, as members know, this is a deeply important and personal conversation for me, as I am the father of six children I have met so far and one who will be born in April.

If the House will indulge me briefly, I just want to say that I am so proud of and grateful to my kids. I love them. I care about them. I am proud of what they do, and I feel so supported by them in the work that I do in this place. The way my kids take care of chores and responsibilities around the house, which maybe I would do if I was home more, is really heartwarming and something I am very grateful for. I am grateful that my kids can come with me to Ottawa from time to time to learn about the work I do here. Even when they are not physically with me, I always have them on my mind and in my heart as I think about the work we are doing and the country we are trying to build for them. That is especially the case, of course, as we deal with these weighty questions of child safety online.

It is interesting the way, coincidentally maybe, the parliamentary calendar has lined up tonight. We are having a debate on Bill C-34, and during private members' hour, we were debating Bill S-209, another important piece of legislation that deals with the question of the safety of children online. It is interesting to look at what these two bills would do, and at some of the similarities and differences. During my speech, I will make reference to some extent to both of those pieces of legislation.

Because I did not have a chance to speak to Bill S-209, I want to recognize and express my appreciation to the whole House for the passage of it at second reading. I think it is excellent legislation. I look forward to the study that is going to happen at committee. I salute the hard work of Senator Miville-Dechêne, as well as my friend and colleague from Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, who sponsored the bill in the House, and my friend and colleague from Peace River—Westlock, who has done so much work on the protection of children online for the entirety of his time as a member of Parliament.

In Bill S-209 in particular, but also included in the provisions of Bill C-34, is the issue of trying to address the scourge of early exposure to pornography on the Internet by young people. This is a massive problem, and I think we should correctly identify it as a form of Internet-based child abuse. Exposing children to sexual imagery is child abuse.

So many children are exposed very early on in life to sexual and often violent sexual images that they stumble upon when on the Internet. Some statistics suggest that the average age of first exposure to pornography is 11, so many children, boys and girls of nine, 10, 11 and 12, are seeing sexual scenes and violent sexual scenes at a time when they are obviously not making choices. They are not knowingly and wilfully doing this. They are stumbling into things they do not understand, and it is shaping their beliefs and expectations in ways that have lifelong effects that lead to increased sexual violence, all kinds of other harms and wildly dangerous expectations of what is expected in the context of intimate relationships.

It is incumbent upon all of us to try to address and confront this epidemic of early exposure to pornographic material by children. This is something we have been talking about in the House and has been talked about repeatedly in the Senate for many years, yet there has been a failure to complete the required legislative action.

● (2150)

We almost got there in the last Parliament, and now we have the continuation of these efforts. There was a similar bill to Bill S-209 in the previous Parliament that the government was not supportive of, so I am very pleased to see the adoption at second reading and look forward to the continuing work as we go forward. I know that Bill S-209 has certain new features that are different from a similar bill in a previous Parliament. It is now the absolute gold standard in terms of privacy protection. The way Bill S-209 has been written, it has been endorsed by the Privacy Commissioner. It has been worked over so extensively across multiple Parliaments to be airtight in terms of the provisions to protect privacy. Again, I want to recognize Senator Miville-Dechêne for her extensive work on that, as well as the colleagues I already highlighted in this House.

Bill S-209 and other bills aimed at protecting children online obviously have to include requirements around age verification or age estimation tools. This is inevitable. If we want to take the position that, on the Internet, some material should never be accessed by children and the same material should be available to adults, the only way to make that distinction is to have credible tools for age verification or estimation. The only alternative to that is you make it available to everybody or you make it available to nobody. Assuming that we agree that a distinction has to be made, we need age verification or estimation tools. That is the only way to do it.

The legislation that has moved forward to committee today would require age verification or estimation. It does not prescribe the specific mechanics of that method, and I think that is appropriate because technology will develop and we will find more and more credible and effective ways of doing this over time. In an area where technology is constantly developing, even over the time the bill is being discussed, we should not prescribe the specific method. The legislation would require that age verification or estimation occur in such a way that children are not being exposed to these materials. Further, it provides an opportunity for the government to prescribe age verification methods that could be used and also establishes criteria for those methods that include the use of third parties and the protection of privacy.

The use of a third party for age verification means that an individual would go to a third party to verify their age or have age estimation in some way with that third party and then receive a kind of digital key. I am not a real technology person, I will admit, so I am sharing terms that may not be the precise technical terms, but this is how the design of the legislation works. It is that people can go to a third party, get what is effectively a digital key and bring it back to whatever site they are trying to access, and the site they are accessing is not the one that did the age verification. The age verification was done externally. It is what I know Senator Miville-Dechêne has called double anonymity. People's privacy is protected because of the use of the third party verification method.

There are these various requirements in Bill S-209 that really make it the gold standard in terms of privacy protection, but we need to have age verification or estimation if we are going to say there is going to be an age cut-off required for access to these kinds of materials. This is very important. We know the problem. The early exposure to pornography is something that desperately must be addressed. We finally seem to have an emerging consensus in this House to be able to move toward the realization of that objective.

● (2155)

As I understand it, Bill C-34 would address the issue of exposure of minors to pornography. However, it would only address it in the context of social media. Bill C-34 would not deal with age verification or estimation for dedicated pornographic websites; that is in Bill S-209. Bill C-34 would deal with pornographic content on social media and the presentation of it on those platforms. Those provisions are certainly important, and action is required on the social media side, but it is important to be clear that Bill C-34's provisions would not address the full range of places where this material is available. This is why Bill S-209 is very much required. Bill S-209 would address everything. It would address all of the places that kind of content is available.

I spoke about being a parent, and I want to just reflect a bit on some of the discussion about the relationship between parents and the state in terms of protection of children online. I believe very much in the paramount importance of parental involvement and parental decision-making. I think the job of the state is to act as an ally to parents, to support parents in the protection of their children by helping parents and maybe by performing tasks parents are not able to perform. The state should prevent bad actors from trying to interfere in the lives of my children. It should try to prevent bad actors from targeting my children with dangerous or abusive material. It should try to protect my children from being exposed to things out and about outside of my home.

People have rightly pointed out that parents can, in the context of their own homes, establish rules around what material their kids can access online. This is true, but many of our kids have access to screens and to the Internet in other places, maybe when they are at school or with friends. We can do our best as parents to provide protections elsewhere, but we cannot be everywhere. We cannot be in those places all the time, so I think it is right and legitimate for the state to seek to protect children in ways that are allied with the efforts of parents. Parents want to protect their kids, and I think they are looking for state action in those other spaces, which is why it is right and legitimate for the state to seek to prevent minors from being exposed to, for instance, sexual material online, but also to other types of dangerous material, insofar as they are doing so in a way allied with their parents.

If we are talking about sexual material, exposing children to that material is a form of child abuse. It should never be allowed, ever, under any circumstances, and the state obviously has a compelling interest in preventing child abuse. I really see the importance of allied action between parents and the state, the paramount importance of the role of parents in the lives of their children, and state action that supports child protection in ways that are allied with the actions of parents.

There is obviously a lot in this bill. I am going to try to cover as much as I can here. On the issue of social media, I agree with what members have said. They have grave concerns about early exposure to social media and some of the design features of social media, aspects of the algorithm, etc. They have an addictive quality. They tend to create anxiety. It is important for us to discuss and look for ways to respond to that. I am quite sympathetic to arguments in favour of establishing that, under a certain age, kids should not have access to social media. I share many of the concerns members have articulated.

I also think it is important to identify that Bill C-34, as it relates to social media, would not impose an age ban as many people understand it would. I was just chatting informally with a colleague about what we mean by an age ban.

● (2200)

What Bill C-34 says is that someone cannot access social media if they are under 16, unless this social media company makes certain adjustments in terms of design features and it complies with certain directives established by regulation. The member said that I have that right. If the social media companies comply with those directives of government, then they will be able to issue youth accounts. In fact, the Liberal member who spoke before me said that they want the existing mainstream platforms to be able to act in ways that will allow them to offer youth accounts so that young people do not end up accessing other dark corners of the web that are less regulated, etc.

The point is, I think it is important for parents at home to know, this bill is not about saying people under 16 should never be on social media. It is about the government saying that it will allow young people to be on certain social media platforms that comply with certain things that the commissioner has established, but it will retain the ability to prevent young people from being on other social media platforms if certain other requirements are not met.

I do not think that constitutes an age ban, as maybe it has been sold, or as most parents understand an age ban to be. I think parents would understand the communications around an age ban to be that young people are not going to be on social media anymore, period. That is not what Liberal members are talking about. Liberal members are talking about a world in which young people would be on social media, on the same social media platforms, and those social media platforms would be required to comply with certain design features. I say that not to affirm or criticize that approach, but simply to say it is important for people to know what that approach is, so that people are not expecting this legislation to be something that it is not. We can have an argument about the idea of an age ban, but we should also kind of debate what is in this bill and whether this is the right approach as opposed to other kinds of architecture.

I think the other concern worth raising and reflecting on, and I know this is going to go to committee and it will be studied there, is how much, in terms of those design features, is being left to regulation. At what point is this going to be through regulation, through the action of a commissioner saying, okay, we kind of like what is going on on this platform and we do not like what is going on on that platform? Of course, we have different kinds of social media platforms that are doing different kinds of things. Some skew a little one way politically, some skew another way politically. There are different things going on, on different platforms.

If we were saying, always and ever, our young people should not be on social media, that would be one kind of architecture, but this sort of involves the government saying, in any case, we are going to have some platforms where people are on them and some platforms where people are not on them, or they can be on those platforms if they comply with certain things the government says. That just raises some potential questions about how regulatory intervention could shape what digital platforms are doing in a world where young people are ultimately still on the platforms. If someone's concern is the anxiety induced by a presence on these platforms, it seems like the world envisioned by the government on Bill C-34 is still one in which minors, people under 16, are accessing social media. It is just subject to some of these limitations.

I do think another thing to just point out is that there is always concern when we have government legislation, with the Liberal government in particular, about the implications for censorship. I am very concerned about genuinely harmful content online and its impact on young people. I also know that sometimes, informally in debate, government members will call things misinformation or disinformation simply because they disagree with it. They will accuse someone else's argument as being disinformation, simply because they disagree with it. I think there is sometimes a lack of trust, legitimately, in the government around actions that it takes online.

We are eager to engage in the discussion around this bill in good faith, because we think there are many important issues that are raised in it. Certainly, we need to act and look for opportunities to act together to protect our children, but there is a lack of trust in the actions by the Liberal government in the online space in general. I think there are good reasons for that if we look at some of the legislation it has brought forward in the past.

Twenty minutes flies by. I could talk for another 20, if this House would allow, but we will have questions and comments soon, so maybe I will be able to add to it at that point.

● (2205)

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Madam Speaker, after listening to my colleague, I realize that we both care about protecting our children online. I think that if we did not care about this issue, we would not be here tonight at this late hour.

Bill C-34 proposes several improvements to better regulate social media platforms in order to protect young people from harmful online content that could have an impact on their mental health.

If my colleague supports the bill's guiding principles and the broad objectives it seeks to achieve, will he vote to send it to committee so that it can be studied in depth?

[*English*]

Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, genuinely, it is always a challenge when we are asked to rule on the objectives of a bill. I agree with the stated objectives. If a stated objective is to protect children, I agree with protecting children. I have a lot of questions about the architecture of the bill and whether it achieves its objectives.

I look forward to the study that is going to happen at committee. I hope we have a detailed and robust study. I hope we are able to see amendments to address some of the issues around the architecture. I think action is required to protect kids online. The status quo is not acceptable. We need new robust responses by government to this challenge.

I hope that through the process of debate, refinement and amendment, we can get to a piece of legislation that answers all the questions that I and other members have and achieves the objective that we are all saying we want.

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member from Edmonton for his thoughtful reply.

I am genuinely interested in getting to the gist of the matter. I would like to give him the opportunity to expand a bit more on the architecture that he thinks would be acceptable to gain his support for the bill. The architecture could be presented either here in the House or at committee.

Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I was getting to it toward the end of my comments. I think the concerns about misinformation, disinformation and hateful content are real and legitimate concerns. I also think that sometimes that language can be used to silence different opinions.

Often in debates in this House, I have heard a person make a good-faith, well-reasoned and perhaps true argument, and someone else says it is disinformation or misinformation. There may have been times when those accusations have been levied in lots of different directions.

We have to be very careful with the creation of a new agency that would establish standards for regulating harmful content and ensure that it is not being used to limit legitimate speech and debate. At the same time, there is real, genuine harmful content that we obviously want to put a stop to. That is the work that has to be done in striking the right structure to get the work done.

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I am surprised that we are discussing the difference between misinformation and disinformation. I think my friend from Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan would agree that if we look at any dictionary definition, "misinformation" can be understood to be an error or mistake, and "disinformation" is defined universally as being deliberately deceptive. Spreading something with the intent to deceive is usually what we find in the dictionary there. I think it is important in this place that we not suggest they are the same term or that they can be confused.

In terms of this legislation, I know there is a lot to be determined later in regulations. For that terminology, can we assume that any commissioner will rely on commonly understood *Oxford English Dictionary* sorts of definitions for the difference, with "disinformation" meaning deliberately deceitful?

● (2210)

Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, of course I agree there is a difference between those two words. My point was simply that those words get thrown around casually, often interchangeably, and admittedly in a way that is disconnected from the true meanings of them. Because it is against parliamentary rules for someone to accuse someone else of lying in this place, I think often people just say that something is misinformation, which is their way of trying to get underneath the rules of not being able to say someone is lying.

The point, though, is that when we have the casual use of the terms "misinformation" and "disinformation" thrown against political critics at the same time as there is legislation aiming to, through legal intervention and online regulation, prevent misinformation and disinformation, there is a bit of a problem: How do we prevent the misuse of terms that we see in political discourse from creeping into the misuse of terms in other places?

I will pick up on what the member said as well. She highlighted the number of decisions that are left to regulation. That is a concern we have in general. The number of decisions in this framework that are ultimately left to regulation rather than established in legislation increases the risk and potential concern of abusive decisions later.

Hon. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, put very simply, this legislation is all about protecting our children. I think everyone in the House recognizes the value of that. Putting in regulations that would ultimately deal with social media services, AI, chatbots and so forth is a good thing. I believe the member would concur with that.

There has been some misinformation. If we take a look at pornography, it is being dealt with in a very limiting way to protect the interests of children. There are also age verification issues within that.

Would the member not recognize that the principle of the legislation is sound and that we need to get it to committee stage, where a lot of the details could be fleshed out? In particular, I am a big advocate of the commission. I think the commission is one of the ways in which we could see an enforcement of the regulations to hold these services and programmers to account. I would like his thoughts on that specifically.

Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I do not doubt the sincerity of every member who is talking about their aspirations to protect kids. I think that aspiration is widely shared. It is also important to underline that good intentions are not enough in legislation. What becomes law is not the good intentions of legislators. What becomes law is the text of the bill. That is the work we are doing now and that we will do at the committee. It is to discuss, as I did in my speech, the alignment between the intentions and the results as they would be created by the legislation.

There are good things in this bill. It is important to acknowledge that there may have been some dissonance in the communication that there would not be an age ban. It would not actually prevent people under 16 from accessing social media. While there are important and positive provisions around pornographic content, it would not cover pornography websites; it would only covers social media. That is why Bill S-209 is important.

The work that is going to happen at committee, the study, is very important. It is important to acknowledge what the bill would do and what it would not do. Again, it would not create an age ban. It does not address all issues of pornography. It only deals with pornography on some kinds of websites. However, there are important and positive aspirations that are expressed through it, and it is worthy of serious and thoughtful study.

Will Greaves (Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have heard my hon. colleagues mention several times, with a bit of fence-sitting, the question of whether the bill constitutes an age ban for young Canadians under 16. I am curious if the member is able to clarify that. In his view, would it be preferable to have a universal ban for Canadians under 16 on social media platforms, or would it be preferable to have social media platforms fix their systems such that there would be limitations on age-inappropriate content and young Canadians could safely use those platforms, given some of the benefits that we know exist? Which of those two options would the member prefer? I cannot tell based on his remarks this evening.

● (2215)

Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, in the point I made, admittedly, I did not comment on that either way. I simply pointed out that the bill is not an age ban.

What would the ideal architecture be? I think there will be lots of time to study that question at committee. I am open to the argument—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Alexandra Mendès): We are resuming debate.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba (Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the digital world now occupies an essential place in the lives of Canadians. It allows us to communicate, stay informed, learn and stay in touch with the people close to us. However, those opportunities also come with risks that we can no longer ignore. Today, children are accessing social media at increasingly younger ages, sometimes without their parents being fully aware. In a few clicks, a child can create an account, start using a platform and become exposed to harmful content while leaving his or her personal data behind.

In this environment, we have to wonder whether we are doing enough to protect our young people. I had a chance to consult with the people of Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie to better understand their concerns about these bills. During our conversations, child protection was front and centre, especially in terms of the negative effects of social media. These discussions reminded me that this issue extends far beyond technology. It concerns our families, our schools, our communities and the health of the next generation.

Parents want their children to reap the benefits of the digital world without being exposed to risks they are not yet able to recognize or manage on their own. As parliamentarians, we have a duty to listen and respond to their concerns.

The data presented in connection with this bill are concerning. According to the available data, over the past decade, depression has doubled and anxiety has quadrupled among young Canadians aged 15 to 24. Research also shows that young people who have been victimized online report three times more suicidal thoughts. These numbers should make us think long and hard about the environment in which our young people are growing up. It is important to recognize that mental health is influenced by many factors.

Social media cannot be held responsible for all the problems young people face. However, when the risks associated with digital spaces compound the challenges that teenagers already face, we cannot afford to look the other way.

According to the data, Canadian police recorded 19,516 incidents of online child sexual exploitation in 2023. That is 59% higher than in 2022. Behind these numbers are victims, families and lives that have been profoundly disrupted. These numbers illustrate the scale of the challenge before us. They demonstrate why digital safety must be regarded as a collective responsibility and why our responses must keep pace with evolving risks.

That is precisely why this bill represents a significant step forward. It proposes a shift from a primarily reactive approach to a more preventive one, in which platforms must assess the risks associated with their services and take measures to mitigate them.

First, tech companies must be held accountable. This bill therefore requires the services in question to regularly assess certain risks associated with their operations, make changes to their design to minimize harm and implement clear reporting mechanisms. It also provides for the publication of digital safety plans to help Canadians better understand the risks inherent to these platforms and the measures taken to address them. This transparency is essential.

Second, the bill proposes to strengthen the protection of children. It prohibits anyone under the age of 16 from owning a social media account, subject to exemptions for platforms that can demonstrate that their services are sufficiently safe for our young people. This approach is based on an important principle, specifically that protection must be built into the design of the services rather than simply added once a problem has emerged.

● (2220)

At that age, young people are going through a critical stage of their development. Their identity is taking shape, their social relationships are becoming increasingly important, and their ability to cope with certain pressures continues to evolve. Repeated exposure to bullying, harmful content and mechanisms that encourage excessive use can pose an additional risk.

Protecting young people does not mean denying their ability to think or make decisions. It means recognizing that the environment they grow in has to take their age and developmental stage into account. It is not just a matter of setting an age limit. It is also about encouraging companies to do more to create safer digital spaces.

The bill provides for expedited procedures to make certain content inaccessible, particularly content that sexually victimizes children or survivors, as well as intimate images shared without consent. When such content circulates online, every share can prolong a victim's suffering. Swift action can help limit its spread and prevent the affected person from being victimized again.

Our policies must be able to respond to today's risks while taking into account that technologies will continue to evolve. Some people may wonder whether these measures might infringe on freedom of expression or privacy. The answer is no. These concerns deserve a serious response. Freedom of expression is essential to our democracy. Canadians must be able to express their opinions, criticize the government, debate social issues and freely participate in public life.

The bill is not intended to suppress legitimate debate or ordinary conversations. It targets specific categories of harmful content, particularly the sexual exploitation of children, the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, the bullying of children and any content that incites violence.

Protecting young people and preserving freedom of expression should not be seen as opposing objectives. We can preserve the right to debate while requiring that businesses take action against serious harm. Privacy protections are just as essential. Age verification mechanisms must be implemented responsibly, with guarantees regarding the collection, use and destruction of personal data. The goal must be to protect young people, not create new risks to their privacy.

To ensure obligations are met, the bill also establishes an independent digital safety commission. Among its responsibilities, the commission would review platforms' safety plans, assess their age-verification mechanisms, support victims and ensure that platforms meet their obligations. It would also have the authority to impose financial penalties on platforms that fail to comply with the law. Under the proposed framework, these penalties could amount to up to 3% of a platform's global revenue. This is important because obligations must be backed by credible enforcement mechanisms.

I would now like to return to the consultations I had the opportunity to conduct with the people of Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie. The concerns raised by constituents remind us that the decisions we make here in the House of Commons have real consequences for families across the country. We must show them that we are prepared to act, not only when harm occurs, but also before it happens. We must ensure that platforms take responsibility, that victims have access to support and that parents are not left to navigate systems over which they have little or no control.

● (2225)

Prevention, digital education, support for families and work with specialized organizations will remain vital, but we cannot use the fact that we are doing those things as an excuse not to take action. Maintaining the status quo is not enough when risks are increasing, technology is changing and children continue to be exposed to preventable harm. We therefore have the responsibility to adapt our laws to address these challenges. We have the responsibility to ensure that platforms that profit from these young people also help keep them safe. Above all, we have the responsibility to place the well-being of our young people at the heart of our decisions.

This bill gives us an opportunity to recognize that just because our children are at home or at school does not necessarily mean that they are safe. We also need to make sure that they are safe in the digital world. By enhancing prevention, demanding greater transparency and accountability from platforms, expediting the removal of some particularly harmful content and establishing independent oversight, we can help create a safer digital environment. We must act with determination but also with discernment by protecting freedom of expression and privacy, which are at the heart of our democracy. Young people deserve to be able to learn, communicate and grow without being left alone to navigate risks that businesses have the means to prevent. That is our responsibility to our families, communities and future generations.

I want to thank the people of Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie for speaking with me and sharing their concerns. They remind why this work is necessary. As young parents, we have a responsibility to keep our children, youth and communities safe. This bill is an important milestone for the community that we represent here in the House. We may not be able to overcome every challenge that the digital world creates, but we can choose to protect the most vulnerable among us more effectively. When it comes to our children's safety, we have a duty to act.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague gave an excellent speech. He touched on a number of the key points in this bill. The reason we are still here tonight at this late hour is that we care deeply about protecting our children online.

I would like to know his opinion of the bill's architecture. Rather than imposing an outright ban, the bill allows platforms to be exempted if they can demonstrate that they have a rigorous safety plan, which would be assessed by an independent commission. That safety plan must show how children will be prevented from being exposed to harmful content. I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that approach. In my opinion, it was the right approach to take.

● (2230)

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. I do agree with my colleague's comment. This bill is intended to prevent harm. It also enables online companies to structure their operations to comply with the Government of Canada's framework. Once this bill is passed, young people who go online will be exposed to a much safer digital environment with stronger safeguards. Young people will be in a safer environment, and parents will have greater confidence that their government is acting responsibly.

[*English*]

Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thought my colleague's intervention was very detailed and a really good analysis of Bill C-34.

He mentioned he had the opportunity to talk to people in his community and I want to know if he had the opportunity to speak to any families or young people about the implications of this proposed legislation.

[*Translation*]

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Mr. Speaker, that question is very much like one that a parent asked me recently when I was at the first meeting about this bill in Saint-Basile-le-Grand.

The parents were very pleased that we were able to meet with them. They made it clear that it was time for Canada to act and that we had made the right decision. Parents shared their concerns with us. In no uncertain terms, they called for regulation. They feel this bill will address mental health concerns by providing much more robust protection against unauthorized images and the proliferation of intimate videos.

Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate my colleague, as well as the people of Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie on having him as their member of Parliament.

Can my colleague explain to the House how this bill will require the platforms to take responsibility for digital security rather than leaving it up to users to protect themselves?

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Mr. Speaker, this bill is not going to impose bans without consequences. These companies know that. We have included penalties of 3% if they fail to reliably implement everything contained in this bill. There will be 3% penalties. This bill requires accountability.

We take comfort in the fact that if companies fail to comply with or respect this bill, they will be penalized by the commission that will be established.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, as my colleague explained, parents cannot monitor their children 24-7. In various settings in real life, we have certain expectations regarding the protection of children, whether at school, in community organizations or in different institutions. When we leave our children in these settings, we expect them to be safe.

Today, the virtual world is playing an increasingly important role in our everyday lives. It is a fact that children spend time in these virtual spaces. That is why I think it is important to put certain regulations in place to ensure the safety of our children when they use platforms like social media.

I would like my colleague to talk a bit more about that.

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Mr. Speaker, as I said very clearly in my speech, through this bill, we must show them that we are prepared to take action not only when harm occurs, but also before it occurs.

This bill is not only preventative. It is also coupled with corporate accountability.

As I said in my speech, children are not safe only at home and at school. When they leave those settings, they are exposed to the digital world. We need to make sure that our children are protected and safe in that world. If they are not, companies will be held accountable, and their fees could amount to 3% of global revenues under the provisions of the bill.

● (2235)

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, quickly, why is it important to establish an independent digital safety commission?

Why is this a step forward, according to my colleague?

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Mr. Speaker, one of the things I like in this bill is that the commission will ensure that the provisions are applied and enforced. This is an independent commission that will closely monitor identity verification and ensure that the law is enforced. If the law is not obeyed, companies will be held liable and subject to a 3% penalty.

Natilien Joseph: Mr. Speaker, I again commend my colleague.

Can he explain how the new digital safety commission of Canada will enable us to better monitor platforms, ensure that they meet their obligations and hold them accountable if they fail to do so?

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his great question.

The commission bolsters the credibility of this bill or the future act. It will prevent any interference from the Government of Canada when it comes to decisions related to the applicability of the bill. The commission will have free rein to monitor these digital companies and take action if they fail to comply with the provisions set out in this bill.

As I said earlier, non-compliant companies will be subject to the measures set out in this bill's accountability framework.

[*English*]

Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we all have a role to play, as members of society and of organizations, faith groups, not-for-profits and community-based groups, in making sure that we protect our children. Outside of this legislation, I know that my hon. colleague is a father. I am a father. Does he have any advice for people within his constituency, but also for Canadians, on how to best prepare young people for the evolution of technology?

[*Translation*]

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his great question.

As I said in my speech, it is important to recognize that mental health is influenced by many factors. Social media cannot be held responsible for all the problems young people face. As parents, as elected officials, we must assess all of the risks associated with digital spaces and ensure that the challenges that young people are already facing are dealt with on a daily basis.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, my colleague said that he spoke with constituents in his riding. Can he tell us more about the response from parents? What feedback did he receive in those discussions?

Bienvenu-Olivier Ntumba: Mr. Speaker, that was the first event I held in my riding this year in relation to the two bills. I am talking about Bill C-36 and Bill C-34.

I was surprised by the response I received from my constituents when I launched the call to consult the people of Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie. The response from parents was overwhelming. I even had some other local elected officials show up to share their point of view and explain why it is important to quickly implement these bills.

[*English*]

Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am rising, of course, to say that in relation to Bill C-34, which would enact the digital safety act, I want to vote for it, I want it to get through second reading and I want it to get to committee, but I am not wildly enthusiastic about the bill.

I am desperately upset and nervous. I hear from all my constituents. I have to say, I hold a lot of community meetings in my riding of Saanich—Gulf Islands. In nine different locations, in a compressed period of time, I saw hundreds of people between Labour Day and when Parliament resumed. At every single one of those meetings, constituents expressed concern about amounts of screen time, about how to protect kids and particularly about artificial intelligence.

From the time we first started looking at this kind of legislation with Bill C-63 to now, looking at Bill C-34, the inclusion of chatbots in this legislation reflects the degree to which the government recognizes that it is not just that kids are being exposed to horrible images. Kids, and seniors for that matter, are tricked by fraudsters who may not be real people at all.

A real live human being, whether they are a troubled adolescent or a senior, can be drawn into deep harm by things that are accessible on websites and on platforms, or whatever we want to call them, and damage is done on gaming sites across the spectrum of what is available on the Internet. With what young people see, and the ways that it affects mental health, the harms that are done have outraged Canadians from coast to coast to coast and people around the world. We have already had many members reflect on the experiences in Australia, the U.K. and New Zealand, and other efforts by other jurisdictions around the world, other democracies, where there is outrage.

I think of the tech giants and the “tech bros”, as they are referred to, whether it is a Zuckerberg or a Sam Altman, as almost, in a historical sense of the growth of human civilization, a cancerous growth that is nothing but harmful. They do well for themselves, but they harm everything all around our society. The reality of their business model is that they harvest private information. They dive deep into our lives. They have damaged Canadian democracy. We should never have given up the digital services tax. We must find a way to try to extract back for Canadian society some of the damage they have caused, but in the meantime, the damage gallops ahead, and now we are looking very seriously, and heartbroken, at the loss of life of our children and the mental health crisis in a number of kids.

I would refer to speeches I have heard in this place, which were excellent, from people across the spectrum, like the hon. member for Lethbridge, who was one of the first speakers on Bill C-34; the member for Outremont, the parliamentary secretary; and just recently tonight, the member for University—Rosedale. Many of us speak not just as parliamentarians but as mothers and, in my case, as grandmothers.

I am, as I mentioned earlier tonight, enraged by what these corporate pirates have been able to get away with. Bill C-34 is a good-faith effort. I have met with parent groups that have self-organized, groups like Unplugged Canada, who say that if Australia can do it, we should too. It is true that Australia's ban for kids under 16 has not worked entirely; 70% of young kids under 16 in Australia are still accessing social media. Frankly, though, if 30% of kids who were on social media in Australia are off, that is better than nothing.

These places are dangerous. I would prefer not to call them “platforms”. Members may have heard me mention this before. We let them call themselves something novel, and in doing so, we allowed them to escape responsibility for what they do. We should have, as a society and across many countries, said, “Hey, you guys. You made up this name, 'platform'. What does it mean? You're a publisher, aren't you?”

● (2240)

If we called them publishers, there is abundant jurisprudence in common law for what to do with a publisher who publishes scurrilous and libellous content. The publisher and the originator of that content are jointly and severally liable, and that has been very effective in making sure that newspapers do not publish anonymous attacks that amount to libel. Instead, we have this sort of neutral term, “platform”, like it is friendly. That is what we thought at first, right? Facebook is friendly. We can make friends on Facebook.

Facebook has managed to evade a lot of basic legal principles. Getting past my outrage as a mom and a grandmother, I look back to my law school background and when I practised law. Where are the principles here from which we can draw some background knowledge, some tools that work? We are here as parliamentarians making laws, so I would like to rely on some solid background jurisprudence that works here.

Obviously, we know there are flaws in Bill C-34. I want to get it to committee. I think the largest flaw is the degree of unknowns in passing the piece of legislation. We do not know what the regulations will look like. We are giving a lot of power to an idea of a commission. It may be the best idea since sliced bread, but there is the digital safety commission and the notion that there will be digital safety plans and that they will be able to evolve things in a magical way that is not yet entirely described. It does not mean I am not going to vote for this at second reading, but it means I would like to see some buttressing.

I thank the Minister of Canadian Identity, who has been consistent since the bill was tabled in June in saying we are going to take time to study it. There are competing interests. Where are we on the civil liberties side? Where are we on groups like OpenMedia? Where are we with enraged parents, with Unplugged Canada? Can we not find some way to improve the legislation in committee to such an extent that we have societal consensus that this will work?

To do that, I started, again, looking at it like a lawyer, as I tend to do, and wondering why on earth we would decide to say, as the bill says at clause 85, "The purpose of a penalty is to promote compliance with this Act and not to punish."

Why would we not want to punish a corporate actor, a private sector profit-making pirate? Why would we not want to punish them if their negligence leads to a child's death? I would like to punish them. Do we think these penalties are going to encourage compliance with the act? The maximum penalty is found at clause 88, at $10 million. To these guys, it is a slap on the wrist. It is the cost of doing business. I would like to make the legislation have some teeth that would guarantee that whatever platform or gaming or new device they dream up, whatever it is they put out there, they will think, "Uh-oh, we're in Canada. We'd better be careful. We can't allow a child to be harmed. If we allow a child to be harmed, that's catastrophic for our bottom line."

There are ways to do that. I think one of them is to not say that the purpose of penalties is to encourage compliance. Let us say that the purpose is to punish the hell out of them, and if they, as corporations, think they are going to come into Canada and not understand the duty to protect children, again, let us look at our precedents.

We have a lot of laws on consumer protection. The member for Halifax earlier said it was like passing a law that said we had to wear seat belts. Well, guess what. It was illegal to sell a car that did not have seat belts. It was not just a slap on the wrist. One could not do business. If we are regulating a product that is inherently dangerous, and these social media platforms are inherently dangerous, we had better make sure we have teeth behind our regulation.

Here is a well-worn principle: strict liability. Let us attach strict liability to making sure that children are protected. Let us not just say "an operator" has a duty to protect children, but the directors of a corporation. Personal liability attaches to directors. At that point, we have their attention because maybe they are going to jail. Criminal negligence and strict liability are principles I would like to see added into the act when it goes to committee, as amendments.

We need to get this right. We need to move ahead. We cannot afford to wait. These companies will come up with new tools and new toys and new tricks. We cannot outsmart them, we cannot outrun them, but we can hold them to account.

● (2245)

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe that there are parents and grandparents in the House this evening.

I listened carefully to my colleague. She said that some improvements are needed.

Can my colleague clarify what changes she would like to see to improve Bill C-34?

Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, yes, I have a lot of ideas and I hope to be able to propose amendments in committee, especially when it comes to punishing social media platforms. Furthermore, there are precedents.

● (2250)

[*English*]

I want to mention quickly that if we look at what we do with anti-spam legislation in Canada, that is attaching to directors their behaviour. If they are aware of this conduct and they direct it, they are personally liable. That is the kind of thing that really gets their attention.

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to my colleague's speech. She talked about young people's mental health. I think that all of us parliamentarians share this concern, or else we would not be here at this late hour debating Bill C-34. We know that excessive use of social media, the bullying that young people can suffer online and the risk that young people may be exposed to harmful content online are all factors that can affect mental health. I also believe that we must all work together to find ways to address this issue as much as possible.

I heard my colleague mention the importance of this bill. However, she has some concerns and questions that she would like to see explored further. I gather that she is prepared to vote in favour of advancing the bill to the next stage.

I would like her to talk about the importance of committee work for a bill like this. Why is it important to conduct a thorough study of the bill in committee?

Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, it is very important for the committee to have time to really study the bill, without closure or time limits. First, the committee needs to listen carefully to the witnesses and take the time to draft the best possible bill. That is why it is so important not to rush things. It is important to take the time to reflect carefully and draft the best possible bill.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, one important aspect of the bill is establishing an independent commission on online safety. This commission will be tasked with reviewing the platforms' safety plans free from any political interference. It will therefore fulfill various roles to ensure that our young people are protected online.

I would like to hear my colleague's thoughts on that. What does she think of the commission proposed in the bill? Does she see that as a step forward?

Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, the idea of the commission is not a bad one, but it is still very vague.

There is also the issue of independence. The commissioner will be chosen by the government or the minister of the day, draw a government salary and implement the government's policies. It is therefore not entirely clear that the commissioner will remain fully independent.

However, that is not the main problem. In my view, the problem is that we have an extremely important duty to protect Canada's children and youth.

[*English*]

It should be with the possibility that if they violate that duty to protect our children, they are going to suffer consequences so severe that they are highly motivated to ensure that their conduct avoids harm to children.

Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today in the House of Commons to speak on Bill C-34 on behalf of the good people of Scarborough—Woburn.

I want to acknowledge that we are having a consultation process on Bill C-34 on Friday and I want to thank all the participants in advance for agreeing to join that discussion.

The times are changing. We have seen, and I have seen, much change over the last few decades here in Canada. It did not seem so long ago when we would spend half a day in a music store going through CDs, identifying a couple of CDs, picking them up, going home and listening to them, or going off to Blockbuster on a Saturday afternoon, finding a few DVDs, picking up some popcorn and going home and making a complete night out of it. Times have changed. Back then, there was technology. We had cellphones. We were lucky if we had a flip phone that could maybe send a text message. The most advanced technology on that was maybe playing the snake game on it. That was pretty advanced technology.

However, we are in a world today where everything seems to be instant. There is such an abundance of content and unlimited choice. We are in a world of constant creation. So much has changed over the last few decades. Now most people have cellphones, tablets, some have virtual reality, smart watches, notebooks. These things are mobile. We can go out there and use them anytime. AI and processing power have increased so drastically and with that we have seen some incredible changes in society, and some of those have become incredible challenges.

Everyone is impacted by these challenges, but I want to talk a bit more about and focus on gen Z. It is the age group that seems to be highly impacted, of course, not only with respect to this legislation, but also the advancements in technology.

Bill C-34 is designed to protect young Canadians in online spaces, and to ensure that social media services and AI chatbots are safe by design. More specifically, it would ban social media for youth and children under 16, unless the service can demonstrate that it is safe. Platforms would be able to submit applications to the new digital safety commission to become exempt from the ban if they can demonstrate their product is safe for children. It would establish a new safety commission to ensure that platforms have safe policies and hold them accountable. There would be age verification, safeguards, a faster removal process for harmful victimization content and, of course, financial penalties.

This is a different type of legislation than we have seen in other jurisdictions. Some members have mentioned Australia. I want to thank the members on all sides of the House, because this has been a really incredible debate to talk about the future of Canada, especially when it comes to our children. Australia introduced legislation, but this is very different, because it attempts to work with platforms to ensure their product is safe. If they can prove that, young people would be allowed to use it. If they cannot, it would not be available to them.

We know there has been a constant increase in screen time for young people over the last few decades. Adolescents are spending literally thousands of hours a year online. The Canadian Paediatric Society and the Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines recommend a maximum of two hours per day of screen time for young people between the ages of five and 17, one hour per day for young people between three and four, and no screen time under the age of two. However, according to recent data from StatsCan, more than half of Canadian children and youth exceed those daily recommended limits, and the average hours of usage are between five and seven hours today. We know there is a direct correlation between the amount of time a young person is online and things like mental health and the stress levels young people feel. Many colleagues have talked about this today. The more screen time, the more stress young people have. Sleep patterns and regulation get altered with increased screen time. We also know that platforms are using very sophisticated algorithms and AI chat boxes that can cause significant harm to young people.

● (2255)

We all have a role to play. As lawmakers, we have a role and there are many things we can do, in addition to Bill C-34, to better position our young people for success. We know that Bill C-34 would, if it passes in the House, be put in place to protect young people online. The spaces we are talking about are online spaces. This is no different, if we really think about it, than how we protect young people at playgrounds. We make sure that playgrounds are safe. They are designed to be safe so young people, when they are using the equipment, are safe from harm. We have to design our online spaces the same way. We need to protect our children by making sure that those online spaces are designed so young people can find success.

Parents have a role to play. We need to make sure that parents are restricting and monitoring how much screen time a young person has. I asked my youngest daughter before I left to come to Ottawa if she could show me how much screen time she had this week. I am not going to mention it because that is her personal business. It was interesting to reflect on those numbers.

In addition to that, we can rely on our educational systems, the curriculum and pedagogy that is out there that goes to protect young people through digital literacy. This is an important piece as well. We need to make sure that digital literacy is at the forefront of this and that we put in place the best types of tools to protect young people.

We know that if we jump online, any of us in this room, and we start going down a rabbit hole based on one or two choices, 30 minutes later we can be in a world that we did not want to be part of and we wonder how we got there. It has happened to every single person. In addition to what we can do as society members, as not-for-profit faith groups and as educators, the government is really looking for ways to better position Canadians for success.

Bill C-34 is just part of a larger group of pieces of legislation that the government has come forward with to help better protect Canadians. Bill C-36 would protect privacy. It relates to deepfakes and AI. Bill C-16, which I believe we passed in June, is the Protecting Victims Act. It protects us, at the end of the day, from the non-consensual sharing of intimate AI-generated deepfakes. Bill C-25 has to do with our democracy: the Strong and Free Elections Act focuses on federal election rules and the use of AI.

In addition to those bills, I introduced a private member's bill in May of this year, Bill C-277. I believe this bill can play an important role in the challenges we have when it comes to artificial intelligence, chatbots and the use of deepfakes. The bill would regulate the online use and dissemination of deepfakes. It would increase transparency and better protect Canadians from serious harm in the digital age. The bill responds to a growing risk posed by artificial intelligence and emerging technology manipulation.

At the core of this bill, Bill C-277, it acknowledges that we, as Canadians, as humans, have the right to our own image, our voice, our face and our likeness, and it puts the onus on technology companies to identify artificially created deepfakes that are online. We own our own images. Labelling can be used to ensure that people, when they see a label, know something is fake, but there is also the ability for us to have that information removed.

In conclusion, Bill C-34 would move our society forward when it comes to placing well-thought protections in place to support the health and well-being of young people. We must remind ourselves that we all have a role to play. We must ensure that young people can benefit from technology without being exposed to its most harmful consequences. This means establishing the appropriate safeguards, which Bill C-34 would do.

Technology will continue to evolve, artificial intelligence will become more powerful and the digital world will become even more deeply integrated into our lives. It is our responsibility to ensure that our laws, institutions and communities evolve with it.

● (2300)

Karim Bardeesy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciated my colleague's speech.

In our riding of Taiaiako'n—Parkdale—High Park, we held a round table, as well as a round table with the member for University—Rosedale. The member mentioned a gathering he is hosting in Scarborough—Woburn on Friday. I wonder if he could share more details about why he has chosen to engage parents in this way and what he expects to hear.

Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, I have the best constituency team in the country. There are incredible people working in my office, and they have engaged with psychologists, doctors, educators, superintendents, youth workers and folks from faith groups. We are asking them to come and meet with us to go over pieces of this legislation and to get feedback. We will collect a bunch of data points, put them together and present it to the minister on behalf of the people in Scarborough—Woburn.

It is a simple model that we have been using more and more. We just did one on the fresh water review. It seems to be a model we can use to make sure that the voices in our community are collected and presented back to the government.

William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the number of hours we are online, and I, too, would be afraid to look at my hours online.

Can the member expand on what he thinks would help to avoid some of the problems they had in Australia, where a lot of the youth are just going around this? How would Bill C-34 address any of the problems they had in Australia?

● (2305)

Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, this bill is different from what took place in Australia. In Australia, there was a complete ban. I think this bill is a realistic approach. We are not going to be able to just ban social media. It is not going to work. We are attempting to work with platforms to ensure that they put in place the right type of safeguards, and the onus is going to be on them to prove they are safe. If they are approved, then they will be open for young people to use. If they cannot reach those specific guidelines or safeguards, they will not be able to present their social media for use with young people in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we know that all parents sometimes experience unbearable stress because of the dangers that our children may be exposed to online. As a parent, I know that feeling.

To what extent can Bill C-34 provide meaningful protection and a genuine sense of security for parents? Can my colleague provide parents with some reassurance and ensure that they are not misled by the opposition's use of this bill for political purposes?

[*English*]

Michael Coteau: Mr. Speaker, it is important for all members of the House to recognize that legislation is important. There is no question that legislation and law set the foundation of the tone and expectation of Canadians, reflected through the members they voted for in the House. This is an important element of our society.

When it comes to young people and the home, there is nothing that replaces guardians, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, community members and neighbours when it comes to making sure that young people have what they need for success. The simple fact is that, if a young person is spending hours and hours each day online without the ability to go outside to play, interact and work with siblings to figure out problems in real time, it will pose a challenge for that young person. It is important that parents set children up for success by making sure that screen time is limited, and that algorithms and platforms are used in a responsible way, which is what this bill attempts to do.

Karim Bardeesy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have the biggest companies on earth with the most sophisticated attention-holding technologies known to humanity, and we have a kid with a phone. There are the most dazzling, seductive, funny, curiosity-inducing images, texts and videos, and there is a family at the dinner table, hunched and shrouded in a blue glow, or there is a classroom of semibored learners. There is a predator, and there is a child on the other side of the world.

It is time to act for these families, kids and learners, and to start to rebalance the playing field just a little. It is time to do what one parent said at the round table the member for University—Rosedale and I co-hosted with SickKids and other stakeholders. She said she wanted her kids to discover who they are, who they were, before their algorithms told them.

This is the opportunity in front of us. This is why we are acting today. This is why we are acting now. This is why we are acting to get it right.

Many of us have had different journeys to this piece of legislation. Many of us have had different journeys to the House. It was the prospect of bringing this bill, and this measure, over the finish line that helped inspire me to run for office. As a parent and a new educator at what was then Ryerson University, in the late 2010s we started to see the kinds of things that are causing such concern today, and that have resulted in the bill before us.

I started a think tank that was then called the Ryerson leadership lab with colleagues Shoaib Ahmed and Sam Andrey. We decided to test what was happening in the world, what Canadians were thinking about the power of this technology and whether they wanted intervention on this. We did a survey. We put it out in 2019 in "Rebuilding Canada's Public Square". This is seven years ago now, and already the appetite was there. In that survey, it was found that 60% of Canadians believed that government should intervene with social media companies to require that they fix the problems they created in our political system.

At that time, in 2019, social media companies were already amongst the least trusted companies in Canada when it came to doing what was in the best interest of the public. Seven years ago, 52% of Canadians already felt that they had little or no control over what they saw in their social media feeds. This was at a time when the social feed still had at least a bit of a chance compared to the algorithmic feed that has become so dominant in our feeds. I mentioned that 60% requested government intervention.

Just two years later, the number of Canadians went up 11 percentage points, with 71% of Canadians supporting government intervention with social media companies. Canadians were already seeing the hateful content, the harmful content, seven years ago and five years ago. Racialized Canadians were 33% more likely to encounter hate speech and 52% more likely to encounter racist content online than non-racialized Canadians.

Already, years and years ago, Canadians were telling us, Canadians were telling each other, young people were telling their parents and educators were telling parents that there was a problem, that these technologies were too powerful, that the machines guiding these technologies were too powerful and that we needed to act. Governments slowly attempted to do so.

In the meantime, in that period of time, the information, the technologies and the research became even more convincing. From the social scroll to the infinite scroll, there is perhaps no more powerful tool in the world to monetize our attention, that most scarce resource, that most precious resource. New features were being added to social media platforms such as streaks, which was fun. I am going to click on this today, and I am going to click on it again tomorrow. I am going to click again, and someone will see that I saw them and I saw that they saw me. That is great.

There were GPS connections within social media feeds. Great, now someone can find me wherever I happen to be, even if I do not know who they are.

On the corporate side, what was happening? Trust and safety divisions were gutted. Content moderation was being rejected. The investment in the very AI tools that can be misused to make the existing tools even more dangerous was embraced by these companies. Companies were suppressing research, litigating or budgeting for the fines they would incur by failing in litigation. It was just a cost of business, as was attacking whistle-blowers.

This adoption of the AI technologies that are being used to supercharge what was already a dangerous platform is kind of like owning the drugstore, buying the cigarette company, and then putting those cigarettes back at the front of the store, but then spiking those cigarettes with crack cocaine made in the pharmacy.

● (2310)

The combination of social media and AI technologies was used in a potent way to monetize the worst forms of attention-seeking and of attention-grabbing content. This was the fundamental objective and the fundamental economics of the platform. The discovery pieces from the lawsuits coming in from the United States thankfully revealed that this was being used in a systematic way by platforms and continues to be used, in the case of X, or Twitter, to monetize our attention and to cause many of the harms we see in front of us.

Meanwhile, what was the research telling us about about the kids, and what were kids and teenagers telling us? Very importantly, we were learning that the time of greatest vulnerability coincided with important life stages and that these differed by sex. For girls, the time of greatest correlation between social media use and lower life satisfaction was between the ages of 12 and 14, during those very key puberty adolescent years, and again at age 19, which is often the age when they take on higher education. For boys, the association between lower life satisfaction and increased social media use was highest between the ages of 15 and 17. Again, this correlates with their journeys through pubescence and adolescence, and into adulthood.

The platforms knew this, and they took advantage of this to feed teens the very content that got them further hooked to these platforms, to their business models. Parents were at a loss. Parents were around dinner tables. Students, including the university students I was teaching at that time, were telling us that they were addicted and hooked to this content. They wanted alternatives they could not find. Policy-makers started to act. We started to act. Just in this Parliament in the last 12 months, as new MPs, we started to act.

At the gathering the member for University—Rosedale and I cohosted, we heard from Coleen Dudley from The Neighbourhood Group, a peer educator who was telling us about the solutions we needed to find. We heard from Jessica Besser-Rosenberg from Unplugged Canada. We heard from Dana Cramer from the Young Digital Leaders of Canada. We heard from the leaders who are on the front lines of these issues saying that it is time to act, that there are solutions available and that we must act.

Recently, at the Attention conference at McGill, we heard Alex Munter of the Canadian Medical Association compellingly say that a parent's no has no power because of the power of the biggest social media companies in the world and their biggest technologies. We heard from Ravi Iyer that AI-empowered chat bots are doing such a good job of easing the way into a false sense of socialization for kids, that kids are losing the ability to have the frictions that are required to develop social learning. Recently, we heard from Suki Huang, a youth champion at The Dais, who told us that the youth did not choose this system, but they feel that they need to be on social media.

What alternatives are available to those kids? I think a complementary piece of work that we and the government have to be doing around news literacy is figuring out, if kids are not present on social media platforms, how they can get that news from other places. We need to put forward efforts to help them touch grass, enjoy the off-line world and be able to gather all those pieces.

This bill, Bill C-34, is a culmination of the work that is a response to all those things I mentioned. I want to salute the former occupant of this seat, the hon. Arif Virani, former Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, who brought a bill forward beforehand. There are so many aspects of this bill that are important, such as the requirement to file digital safety plans, the requirement to publish those plans and the requirement for the commission to review them. This would not just protect kids; this would protect all of us, because if the digital safety plans and the design features that need to be improved would be improved with a push from this bill and from the commission, which would need the crucial flexibility to adapt to changing technologies, then we would have a safer online space, not just for teens, but for everyone. There would be the requirement of a resource person to address user concerns. How nice that would be. Who has tried to reach out to a social media company and been deterred?

We have learned so much over the last six to seven years. We have been able to experience and expose the harms that have been created. It is time to take our agency back. It is time to reclaim a greater share of digital sovereignty for Canada. It is time to claim a share of our humanity back. It is time to act now, and protect not just the kids, but everyone in Canada.

● (2315)

William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member raised how racism and hate speech are definitely deplorable and should be prevented and punished. That said, how does the member opposite see Bill C-34 determining what qualifies as free speech and hate speech? Who would be qualified to make those determinations going forward with Bill C-34?

Karim Bardeesy: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate and identify with many of the desires of the freedom of speech and the fundamental protections that exist in the charter.

We have provisions in our hate crimes legislation that are very clear about the difference between, for instance, speech that seeks to vilify or dehumanize and other forms of speech. I believe the existing pieces of legislation we have will be looked at closely by the digital safety commission, just as they are looked at by any police service that has to enforce them.

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not have any children of my own, but I am an uncle and a godfather. These children will grow up facing risks that we never had to confront as children. As legislators, we must understand that and implement a regulatory framework that ensures our children's online safety.

Could my colleague explain why it is important to act now and how Bill C-34 represents a significant step forward in protecting children in the digital world?

● (2320)

Karim Bardeesy: Mr. Speaker, as it stands, parents and teenagers themselves lack the necessary tools.

Two or three years ago, my family met with other parents in our neighbourhood to share advice on how our four families could work together to help our children deal with these issues, while also helping us as parents navigate them.

Teenagers and children are not the only ones affected by social media and its ability to connect us with others and share information.

In my view, the commission will be responsible for providing guidance to parents and families, and the bill itself does a great deal to help parents.

[*English*]

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his remarks. I know they come from a place of really wanting to do right by our youth, and I know that is a goal we all share.

I am wondering if the member can define what an adequate safeguard is.

Karim Bardeesy: Mr. Speaker, there are going to be lots of places that do that, like through the commission and through the regulations that may come out of the act. I think it is important to have transparency. We do not have transparency at the moment. In fact, we have had the opposite of transparency. We have had the intentional obfuscation or intentional suppression of what some of these platforms are doing.

I believe that this legislation and the commission's actions, in particular the filing of digital safety plans, will force a levelling up that will bring more transparency to these things.

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, in answer to my question, my colleague began talking about the new digital safety commission of Canada that this bill will establish. I would like to give him the opportunity to elaborate on why he thinks setting up this commission is a positive step forward.

Karim Bardeesy: Mr. Speaker, anything we can do to reduce people's dependence on social media will be helpful. The commission's role is to publish research and review social media platforms' plans. In my opinion, the commission will enable us to help social media platforms be more positive and earn people's trust.

[*English*]

Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I start my speech, as many members have, with thoughts of my children. I have a 10-year-old son and an eight-year-old daughter, who are hopefully asleep by this point in the debate. I am living in this wonderful spot where they still like hanging out with their dad and do not have the device that many of us have in our pockets, with constant unfiltered access to the Internet. Having seen this debate before and having many colleagues and friends who have children who are older, I am afraid, like many Canadians. I am afraid of what will happen in a few years with the conversation when they ask, "Can I have a phone?"

That conversation is coming. It is coming for all of us as parents. It is worrisome. We have ready access to the world in our pockets. I am old enough to remember the promise that this would be an enormous blessing, that it would be incredible for our society. In many ways it is, but in so many ways it is a curse. Like all of us in this place, I have talked to so many parents who are worried and who are afraid.

When I was thinking about what I was going to say today, I was taken back to the last Parliament when I was on the justice committee, and we were doing a prestudy of Bill C-63, which was a previous iteration of online harms legislation. The topic was so important that despite a filibuster going on in the House, it was important for everyone at the justice committee to discuss it. I have been through a lot of difficult bills and studies in this place at committee, and I have to say that that one was the hardest by far. We had witness after witness and parent after parent who tried, who did everything they could, but whose son or daughter is no longer with us. They were children who felt trapped and cornered in these online spaces.

We can talk about or suggest there was bad parenting, but these were parents who were paying attention. It should not matter, because our kids should be safe. We want our kids to be safe in all the spaces they occupy. I do not know that any member can stand up here today and say, and I am not suggesting that anyone has, that they are safe, because they are not.

As the previous member said, these algorithms are dangerous. They take our kids to dangerous places. It was shocking to me that the algorithm knows. If someone is inclined to an eating disorder, it will show them people who are inclined to that particular affliction. If someone is inclined to hate speech, it will show them that as well, because the goal is to keep us focused on our phones as much as possible. It is the goal of the algorithm, and it is powerful.

Having dealt with these social media companies, these big tech companies, through various bills, whether it was the Canada Elections Act, the Online Streaming Act or the various digital bills we have passed and debated over the years that I have been here, one thing has been certain to me: These companies do not care. These American tech giants do not care and have contempt for this place.

I have watched them too many times come to parliamentary committees, be evasive, not answer members' questions and have a complete disregard for what we are doing. These companies are so powerful that they can ignore a parliamentary summons. We are still waiting for Mark Zuckerberg to appear from a previous parliamentary summons. I do not think those carry over, but he was summonsed. He did not care; he did not have to. It does not matter. That was Meta.

● (2325)

Google was slightly better before the heritage committee. Its representatives would come and be evasive. They would do their few minutes and move on. They did not care about the safety of Canadians. They even set up an astroturf campaign over one of our bills, with a fake individual who was arguing on behalf of artists. He had no members. He was just receiving money from Google and Meta, I believe. Basically, he was an unregistered lobbyist whom we caught lying to the heritage committee. Google did not care. It denied ever being behind it, even though this person testified he was receiving money from the company.

To them, a bunch of kids dying is the cost of doing business. I hope that shocks all of us. I think it does. Having listened to many of the speeches here today, I hear there is a willingness to do something. It is important for Parliament to debate what that is, but it is shocking to see across the border the lack of willingness of our American friends and neighbours to regulate these companies, to rein them in.

I do not know about everyone here, but I am tired of the harm. I am tired of the stories. Recently, a colleague of mine asked me to stop by a reception at the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, which does incredible work, against all odds, and is based in Winnipeg. We talked to parents who feel that their backs are against the wall and who have lost kids or had kids kidnapped. One of the parents had their child kidnapped through readily available software that was accessible in the child's school. When I look to these parents, they look to us and ask what Parliament is doing. We need to act.

I hear from members of this place that we should let parents parent, that it is not for the government to step in. I can appreciate that this is coming from a good place, but these companies are so powerful. Parents are busy. It is easy to let kids have some screen time. They cannot be over their shoulder 24 hours a day. The rabbit holes they can go down are incredibly dangerous and can lead to their deaths. Whether it is extortion leading to suicide, kidnapping, or all the horrific stories we have heard, we need to step up.

We have a willingness to act, but it is shocking to me, and I hope it is shocking to everyone, having watched these companies do nothing, that we need to impose duties upon them: the duty to protect, the duty to act responsibly and the duty to make content inaccessible. They make so much money off of this. It should be shocking to all of us, to all Canadians, that Parliament needs to step up and say to these social media companies that they need to do the right thing, because they have been absent for so long.

A member from Scarborough at our committee asked a Google executive, when Google came up, about a sign on the wall at its headquarters. It said “Do no evil”, which was probably mocking Microsoft. Google took down that sign. It was too embarrassing.

I hope that we have a good debate, that we move forward with this legislation and that the committee has an excellent discussion about what moves forward next, because we owe it to our kids.

● (2330)

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his heartfelt speech. He spoke about the importance of Bill C-34, which seeks to keep children safe online. I think this is a good example of a bill where all political parties must work together. As parliamentarians, we all need to be mindful of this issue.

Does my colleague think it is important for the government and the official opposition to vote in favour of the bill at second reading so that we can study it in committee?

[*English*]

Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, the bill needs to get to committee.

I have been here a couple of years, and I have not seen a bill this size go through unamended. I imagine the committee will hear a lot of the same heart-wrenching stories that I heard, and I hope this compels committee members to act as quickly as possible. I do not envy them. I would not want to go through it again, but it is important work that Parliament will do. I know that every member of the House wants to protect our kids, but Parliament needs to act, government needs to step up and we need to do better for our children.

William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am assuming the bill will go to committee. When it gets there, what does the member see as the division, the line, between, on the one side, what is going to help protect our children and, on the other, free speech?

I am lucky that my daughters are both in their twenties now. I cannot really worry too much about them, but I do worry about the future, when I hopefully have grandchildren. Over 10 or 20 years, things are changing rapidly. How can this legislation be lasting and actually have a long-term future?

● (2335)

Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, to be honest, I am envious of the hon. member, and I hope I can find a way to jump my kids to that point through these difficult times.

The member keeps talking about free speech, which is fundamentally important and protected by the charter. To paraphrase, I think it was Jon Stewart who said that social media is to free speech like twinkies are to food. It is highly processed garbage. The algorithm is controlling what we see and what our kids see. We cannot just wave this away as free speech and hope the social media companies will do the right thing, because we have seen, for too many years, that dead kids are okay to them and part of their business model.

The committee will meet and do important things. Amendments will be made, and we will get to the best possible legislation we can, but we need to get the bill there as quickly as possible.

Doly Begum (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently, and I really appreciate the concerns the member brought up. Our children's safety is paramount, and he talked about how scary it is when they go into a different world when they are online.

One of the things Bill C-34 would do is create the digital safety commission, which would allow us to make sure we are protecting our children. Can the member elaborate on some of the things the commission would have and how important it is?

Chris Bittle: Mr. Speaker, it is important to have a regulator with some teeth. Again, we can talk about letting parents parent and about the concerns about free speech, which are genuine and need to be discussed in this place, but in the absence of a regulator to enforce the bill and to hold companies to account, it is going to be a challenge. These are powerful companies that are going to do whatever they can to water down this bill. I have seen it before, but we have to do our best to provide actual concrete protections for our children, and I believe the commission would do that.

Will Greaves (Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here this evening, hearing from my hon. colleagues in this debate on this important topic, which is one that speaks to me very directly as the father of a young child.

I rise to speak in favour of the safe social media act. During debate tonight, we have heard extensively about the merits of the bill, and I echo many of those sentiments. I will speak to the legislation in a moment, but I wish to reflect first on the nature of the digital world that our children today inhabit, which is fundamentally different from that which most of the members of the chamber grew up in, in some cases just a few short years ago.

I have worked with young people since I was a young person. As a teenager and as a young adult, I worked with children and youth across Canada in after school programs, in summer camps and as a member of the Royal Canadian Army Cadets. For days and weeks at a time, we would hike, camp, swim, march, paddle, bike and climb. Endless hours were spent outdoors, in nature, interacting with our peers face to face, with nary a cellphone, touchscreen or digital device to be seen. Later in my career as an academic, a university professor and an educator, I worked with thousands of young adults pursuing post-secondary education without ever having heard the words “generative AI”, or “ChatGPT”.

I confess that I am an elder millennial, so I remember when dial-up Internet first arrived in my family home, and I remember as a late teenager getting my own first cellphone, which flipped open, could display two colours and was decidedly not smart. The hon. member for Scarborough—Woburn stole my joke about the snake game earlier, so I will move right along.

Today, at this stage in my life, it is a great joy but also a great worry to be father to an extraordinary almost 11-year-old daughter, who is growing up in a world that is not only different from the one that I was raised in but is meaningfully different even from the one the hon. generation Z members of the House experienced, as I said not long ago. The reality is that today's children are growing up in a world fundamentally different from that of previous generations. The Internet has become woven into nearly every aspect of their lives, even if they do not yet have a device.

Online is where young Canadians learn, connect with friends, explore interests, create content and engage with the world around them. It is also where they spend vast amounts of their time and attention, consume misinformation and disinformation, encounter strangers, discover pornography and experience a range of negative social experiences, including isolation, bullying, exploitation and in some cases, sexual and psychological abuse.

We know that the digital world offers tremendous opportunities, but we must also confront the difficult truth that for too many children, the online world is a place of significant risk. Data that has been widely discussed in debate this evening shows that 52% of Canadian teens have received unwanted sexual images online, while 44% report being pressured to send sexual photos. In 2023 alone, police in this country reported nearly 19,000 incidents of online child sexual exploitation, representing a 500% increase since 2014.

Clearly, this goes in tandem with the massive explosion of social media in our society, and we know that young people who experience bullying and victimization online are three times more likely to contemplate suicide. These are not just statistics. They represent real families, real children and real communities dealing with the consequences of online harms from an underregulated, corporate-controlled Internet that does not have their best interests in mind.

We know that these harms are also evolving rapidly. The rise of artificial intelligence, conversational chatbots and increasingly sophisticated digital platforms presents new opportunities but also new risks, which our laws have not fully addressed because they were not designed to do so. Parents, educators, advocates and experts are clear: Children's safety online cannot be an afterthought any longer.

As legislators, we have a responsibility to ensure that our laws keep pace with the digital world and provide meaningful protection for young Canadians. This is exactly what the safe social media act seeks to achieve. At the heart of this legislation is the simple principle that digital platforms, and the tech companies that own them, must take responsibility for protecting children who use their services.

● (2340)

For too long, responsibility has fallen primarily on parents, teachers and young people themselves to navigate systems that were never designed with the well-being of children in mind. This bill would change that. It would establish a clear duty to protect children that applies to regulated social media services and chatbots. Rather than waiting for harm to occur, platforms would be required to proactively design and operate their services in ways that prioritize the safety of younger users. This represents a fundamental shift in approach. Children's safety would not be optional. It would not depend on whether a company or its foreign owner chooses to act. It would become a baseline expectation for those companies to operate in Canada.

Importantly, the legislation recognizes that children are not all the same. The social and emotional development of a 12-year-old differs in meaningful ways from that of a 16-year-old. That is why, instead of a one-size-fits-all approach, the safe social media act would allow for flexible, evidence-based requirements that can evolve alongside technology and keep up with emerging online risks.

The legislation would establish important protections regarding access to social media and digital content, and I wish to highlight five, in brief, in particular. First, regulated social media services would be required to prevent children younger than 16 years old from creating or maintaining accounts unless the platform can demonstrate that it provides an appropriate, safe environment and qualifies for an exemption. This approach would create a strong incentive for companies to build safer platforms, while ensuring that children's interests remain at the centre of decision-making.

A second key aspect of the legislation is protecting children from exposure to pornographic content online. Under the bill, regulated services would be required to implement age verification or age estimation measures to ensure that individuals below the age of 18 cannot access pornographic content. At the same time, the legislation would rightly place a strong emphasis on privacy protection, requiring that any information collected for age assurance be limited, used only for that purpose and not retained any longer than necessary.

A third important feature of the bill is recognizing that social media is no longer the only digital environment where children spend their time. Increasingly, young Canadians interact with artificial intelligence systems and chatbots. While these technologies can offer certain benefits, they also present unique challenges. There have been troubling reports of chatbots promoting self-harm, encouraging harmful behaviours, providing inappropriate content, fostering unhealthy dependence and even inciting individuals to violence. A most egregious example of this is the unspeakable tragedy that occurred at the start of this year in Tumbler Ridge in my province of British Columbia. My heart still goes out to all the families affected by that horrible event.

This is why the safe social media act would extend to chatbot services. These services would be required to act responsibly by mitigating the risks of communicating harmful content and by implementing crisis intervention protocols when users express intentions to harm themselves or others.

Fourth, the legislation would address specific categories of content that can have devastating consequences for children. This includes content that sexually victimizes a child or revictimizes a survivor of sexual violence, content that induces a child to self-harm and content used to bully a child. The other parents in the chamber and parents watching at home will know how pernicious cyber-bullying is and how devastating it can be for our children. Simply put, social media platforms currently amplify and monetize harmful behaviour. When this happens to a young person, the effects can be severe and long-lasting.

Finally, the legislation includes strong accountability measures. The new digital safety commission would play an important role in ensuring accountability, handling complaints, strengthening protections and promoting online safety awareness across Canada.

Ultimately, the bill is grounded in a simple belief that we have overlooked for far too long: that children deserve to be safe online. The safe social media act would establish a modern framework that recognizes both the opportunities and the risks of the digital age. It would create clear expectations for platforms, introduce proactive protections, address emerging technologies and place the safety and well-being of children at the centre of our government's approach. Frankly, as a society, we should probably aim to have our children spend less time on the Internet, but as a society, we have a responsibility to ensure that when children are online, they are safe and protected from the harms that we know await them there.

I encourage my colleagues to support the bill as it moves through committee and comes before the chamber for a vote.

● (2345)

Wade Grant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like my colleague, I am a father of a young girl. She has grown up in the days of the digital age. This proposed act is one that will really be appreciated by parents like him. Why does he approve of this measure and how would it make him feel better as a parent as his daughter grows up?

Will Greaves: Mr. Speaker, I shared this reflection earlier in response to a different question from a different colleague. At the moment, many parents across this country share these concerns. We know the dangers that await our kids on the Internet, and we are concerned in particular about increasingly young children having access to unfiltered information through the devices that are increasingly common in their classrooms.

Having parents bear the responsibility to monitor their children's Internet use, but also to control their access to digital devices, really does individualize this problem. It makes it a problem for individual families and for individual parents. As all parents know, our kids are extremely good at placing pressure on us to come to their preferred outcome or decision.

By having strong regulations at the national level, by having a national framework around social media use for young Canadians, individual families would no longer have to make this choice. As a society, we would draw a line and say that enough is enough.

● (2350)

William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a gen X-er who has two daughters who are gen Z, I often found myself learning from my children how to navigate social media content. Maybe we should actually be listening to some of the gen Z who have gone through this transition with us. I am wondering what kinds of benefits or protections they can offer in their transition, because they have lived this through their life. Of course, they are not the ones we are aiming this for at this point in time, but maybe the member can give me some insight on what he thinks of their contribution.

Will Greaves: Mr. Speaker, certainly we have much to learn from Canadians of different ages on this subject. We all have different relationships to technology depending upon our age. I do think there is much we could learn from members of gen Z, but I will say that as a generation that, in many instances, perhaps most instances, would have grown up with ubiquitous Internet and ubiquitous digital technologies in their life, gen Z may not be best placed to actually reflect upon how their experience of technology has differed from those of previous generations who did not have that access and whose relationship to the Internet was very different.

That said, I will note the speech earlier tonight from the member for New Westminster—Burnaby—Maillardville, who is a member of our generation Z caucus and one of the four 21st century babies in this chamber. We have heard from the younger members of our caucus directly based on his experience, which is shared, I am sure, by many others of his age. He spoke very strongly in support of this bill, as I am sure most members of generation Z would as well.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, platforms would be able to apply to the new digital safety commission for an exemption from the age ban if they can demonstrate that their projects are safe for children. I ask my colleague if he thinks this is the appropriate approach, rather than imposing a full ban, so that children can use social media if it can be demonstrated that it is safe to do so.

Will Greaves: Mr. Speaker, absolutely, what we have before us is really the preferred outcome of having social media platforms that were hospitable and age-appropriate for young Canadians. We understand there are benefits from social media. This is not a blanket anti social media position. The problem, of course, is that at present, those platforms have content that is not appropriate for young people. If the platforms can clean up their act and have age-appropriate content, then there is no need to ban young Canadians from social media.

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.): Mr. Speaker, it is great to be here this evening and debate Bill C-34, the safe social media act, a bill that I strongly support. Before I begin, I want to ask every member of the House to think just for a moment, not as parliamentarians but as parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, coaches and mentors, whatever position they hold in relation to younger people. Think about the young person in one's life. Think about how different their childhood is from the one many of us experienced.

A generation ago, when the school bell rang, most bullying ended for the day. If a child was having a difficult time at school, home was often a refuge. There was a chance to step away, to breathe, to reset. Today, that is no longer the case. The playground follows our children home. It travels in their pocket. It sits beside their bed. It is there when they wake up in the morning and is often the last thing they see before they fall asleep at night. The comments, the likes, the notifications, the screenshots, the videos and the conversations continue long after the classrooms have emptied out.

I know this is true not just as a member of Parliament but as a father of three girls. I am a proud father of three girls but I also take the responsibility of keeping them safe very seriously. Over the past few years, as social media has grown in influence, concerned parents throughout my community of Whitby have shared similar stories. Some have watched their children become withdrawn and anxious. Some have found themselves dealing with the aftermath of cyber-bullying. Others have discovered that their children were being pressured to share intimate images or repeatedly exposed to content that no child should ever have to encounter.

What is most striking is that these parents often feel powerless. They try but they cannot monitor devices. They set rules and have conversations, but they are operating in an online environment that changes faster than any family can reasonably keep up with. It never stops.

My wife and I have tried to keep my 15-year-old daughter off social media. She does not have a cell phone, and that is an ongoing battle in our household. We have done that for a specific reason, which is to try to keep her safe, to keep her self-esteem high and to protect her mental health, realizing that she cannot always self-regulate, and that most kids are not able to self-regulate at such a young age. I know I was not able to do that with video games when I was a kid, and my parents gently encouraged me to get off the computer games at night. Social media is a whole new reality, and that reality is what brings us here today.

We need to make social media safer for our children and grandchildren. One of the things that has struck me most in those conversations with parents is that they are not looking for government to solve every problem in their child's life. They understand that raising resilient, thoughtful young people starts at home. They know there is no substitute for parenting, for open conversations around the dinner table or for teaching children how to navigate difficult situations. What they are asking for is fairness. They are asking why the responsibility seems to fall almost entirely on families while some of the most powerful companies in the world face so little accountability for the environments that they create.

Parents can set rules. They can limit screen time. They can talk to their children about making good and better decisions but they cannot redesign algorithms that are designed specifically to target them and that are almost impossible to counteract. They cannot rewrite recommendation systems. They cannot remove harmful content from platforms or build safer products. Those responsibilities belong rightfully with the companies that create those services. I think most Canadians would agree that if a company profits from the attention of young people, it should also have a responsibility to consider their safety.

The Internet has transformed our world in remarkable ways. It has connected families, opened doors to learning and created opportunities that previous generations could never have imagined. Our children are growing up in a world where communication, education, entertainment and community increasingly exist online. The challenge is not the technology itself. The challenge is that many of the safeguards we would expect to accompany that technology have not evolved at the same pace as the technology. The evidence of that gap is impossible to ignore.

● (2355)

More than half of Canadian teenagers report receiving unwanted sexual images online. Nearly half say they have felt pressure to send intimate images themselves. One in four young people between the ages of 12 and 17 report experiencing cyber-bullying. Police-reported incidents of online child sexual exploitation have increased dramatically in recent years. In fact, it is up 500% since 2014. Research consistently shows that young people who experience online victimization are far more likely to struggle with serious mental health challenges. I have a very active constituency youth council. Members of my constituency youth council often cite mental health issues as their top issue. It is no doubt that online involvement and things they encounter online are contributing to the youth mental health crisis across the country. When we look at those numbers, it becomes clear that online harms are not isolated incidents. They are affecting children in communities right across our country, including in my own community of Whitby.

What is also becoming increasingly clear is that these harms are not solely the result of individual bad actors. They are often amplified by the design of the platforms themselves. Many online services are built to maximize engagement. The longer users remain on a platform, the more valuable that engagement becomes. Recommendation systems continuously serve up new content. Endless scrolling eliminates natural stopping points. Autoplay features keep videos running long after the user intended to stop. For adults, these features can be difficult enough to navigate. For children and teenagers, whose brains are still developing, the impact can be far greater.

We need to remember that young people, as they develop, do not have the same self-regulation abilities that are developed in adults and this is the challenge that we experience. Even adults become addicted to online doom scrolling. We are all probably guilty of that in this place. My daughter often says to me, “Dad, you're always on your cell phone. You're always on social media, so why can't I?” I say to her, “Because you don't know how to regulate. I know how to put it down.” The reality of it is that she is right. We are all guilty of this. We all need to do a better job regulating ourselves. I think young people are more vulnerable and susceptible to not being able to control that urge and the online platforms are designed specifically to exploit that addictive behaviour that we see in most young people when they get online.

This is why Bill C-34 represents such an important shift in how we think about online safety. Rather than responding only after a child has already been harmed, the legislation asks for a fundamental question to be answered: What responsibilities should platforms have to prevent harm in the first place? At the heart of this bill is the duty to protect children. It recognizes that children are not simply smaller adults and that services used by millions of young Canadians should be designed with their safety in mind from the outset. That safety by design is a principle that is sound and straightforward, but it represents a significant change. For years, much of the responsibility has rested with parents, educators and children themselves. While those roles remain essential, there is growing recognition that platforms must also be accountable for the environments they create.

The expectation is not perfection. No legislation can eliminate every risk and no platform can prevent every harmful interaction. What Canadians are asking for is something much more reasonable. They want companies to identify foreseeable risks, take meaningful steps to reduce those risks and be transparent about the measures they have put in place. Bill C-34 would establish those expectations and obligations, and hold online platforms accountable. It would require regulated services to consider how their products affect children and build age-appropriate safeguards into the way those products operate. It would require companies to assess risk, publish digital safety plans and provide users with practical tools that help them protect themselves.

Most importantly, the bill would focus attention on some of the most serious forms of harm that exist online today. Specifically, it would entrench a duty to make that content inaccessible. Whether it is non-consensual sharing of intimate images, the sexual exploitation of children, persistent cyber-bullying, content that encourages self-harm, or material that promotes hatred, violence or extremism, Canadians increasingly expect platforms to take responsibility when their services contribute to those harms.

I will end it there, but I just want to say I am really proud to stand with a government that has put forward this legislation. It is a really essential topic for me and the constituents in my community, and it will help keep my children safe.

● (2400)

Wade Grant (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it always good to listen to my friend from Whitby. I know that he has three young daughters. I only have one young daughter, and I am always worried about her.

He has been talking about the worry he has. When we move forward with laws like this, how do they ensure that he and his daughters, and any future children he may have, are protected?

Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we really want assurances. My wife and I have had many conversations about how to keep our daughter safe online. We have found it challenging to keep her off these devices and platforms. With no real regulatory framework in place in Canada, it just seems like it is the wild west of online engagement.

For my daughter's digital safety, we have had to take extreme measures to try to protect her, from taking away her devices to monitoring all online activity. She can be doing her homework late at night on a laptop, but she is really online on Snapchat or some other platform. The things we see that she has been exposed to make us really concerned. Some of her friends have been exposed to intimate images, which they have been encouraged to share, and that has created problems in her friend group.

This bill would hold the social media platforms accountable. It would put in place a mechanism and a set of responsibilities that would ensure my daughter's safety in the future.

● (2405)

William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I admire the parenting the member has done. Abstinence from social media is virtually impossible these days for most parents. Even for mine, 15 years ago, it was a bit of a challenge.

Going forward, how does the member opposite see Bill C-34 addressing the concerns with how it would apply to different social media? He said the bill would make them responsible, but how are they going to know that it applies to them if they are a small start-up or a small influencer? How are they going to know that they would be affected? We assume it is good for the big ones, but what about the other ones out there?

Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Speaker, the bill would put in place obligations, which would be very clear, to have online safety plans. It would put in place a digital safety commission, which would oversee and monitor things, look for any infractions and understand that there are obligations for platforms to take down or make inaccessible images that are harmful. The bill would also codify the types of online harms in many ways.

From multiple perspectives, it would create a framework that would be useful in regulating online platforms. These platforms are innovating, developing quickly and continuing to evolve, so I imagine we would have to continue amending this legislation in the future. However, it is a significant step forward from where we are at today, where I fear for young people's safety online every single day.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member just described the “what” and the “how”, but I am interested in the “who”. How many platforms will this bill apply to? Which platforms will it apply to? How will those platforms know that the bill is meant for them?

Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Speaker, it would apply to all social media platforms, as I understand it.

I do not understand the nature of the question or where it is coming from. Maybe there is a sense of skepticism on the other side, but I think this bill has been written in a way to focus on the outcome that we want, which is to keep young people safe while they engage online. It would put in place a number of different safeguards and guardrails around that, and I think that is a positive step forward.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a society, we absolutely have to do something about the harm being done to our kids online. Parents are struggling. Teachers are struggling. Schools are struggling. Our youth are left navigating a world where the adults have not figured out how to adult on this one yet. I think we can all agree that the kids are not all right.

Parliament's constitutional authority over communications that cross provincial and international borders gives this chamber its mandate. A school board cannot regulate a multinational platform, and parents cannot demand design changes to apps, but having the authority to act, which we have here, does not make the problems any easier to solve. We do not know yet whether this bill can deliver the protection that parents and others expect, or whether it will inevitably result in the overreach its critics fear. Too many concepts in this bill remain ambiguous, and too many of the ultimate rules depend on decisions Parliament is being asked to authorize and delegate before Canadians can know what those decisions will be.

I have held multiple well-attended town halls on child and teen use of social media in my communities. I have spoken with lawyers practising across multiple disciplines. I have consulted with experts, teachers, parents and school board officials. There are a lot of opinions out there. People are just as emphatic that this bill must pass as others are that it will be a disaster if it does. The disagreements are passionate, and there are plenty of misconceptions and misperceptions as to what will happen and what things will mean. The way this bill is currently drafted makes it impossible to validate, course correct or reassure any side.

Supporters see children being sexually exploited and online feeds pushing harmful material at vulnerable kids. They want companies held responsible for products designed to keep children engaged, and they are tired of being told to supervise their kids more closely when they cannot control what a platform does. They put forward a compelling case for online safety measures and regulations.

Critics fear that enforcing the age restriction would mean collecting more information about everyone, including adults. They fear the regulator would have excessive control over lawful expression or that the information they provide online in proving their age would be used for other things. Here in this place, where we are ultimately responsible for the unintended consequences of sloppy drafting, we do not get to just dismiss concerns like these, even for legislation with a worthy purpose.

The Canadian Mental Health Association has recognized one of the paradoxes of the blanket age provisions in this bill. While supporting the bill, the association recognizes the inherent value of an online community, particularly for rural young people or those from marginalized communities. The reality is that the same service that can expose a youth to harm can also connect them to people who can help. A blanket account restriction leaves them without both, and it does not tell us where a youth may go next. If they move to a less regulated service, parents might find it harder to supervise. The government needs evidence that its approach will reduce harm overall, including for children and youth who work around the rules.

There is nothing in the under-16 restriction that would prevent a youth from browsing without an account, where harmful recommendations can still reach them. It also excludes private messaging features from the duties on social media platforms. The bill does not expressly require government identification to be used as proof of age. Parents need to understand these limits, just as critics need to distinguish what the bill says from what they fear it might become. The legislation would fix the age for access at 16 while leaving many of the actual safety requirements undefined.

Cabinet may decide which services are covered and which face account restrictions. A new digital safety commission would have the power to prescribe mandatory design features and additional requirements for age checks. These decisions are the ones that would determine the extent to which youth are actually protected and how much information adults must disclose.

● (2410)

The government points to exemptions as reassurance, but not everyone is reassured by them. Others do not think there should be any exemptions. A service could admit youth under 16 if the commission accepts that it has put “adequate safeguards” in place. I do not know what that means because the detailed test remains unwritten. What adequate safeguards are at this point is anyone's guess, and I can assure everyone that if we got a group of people together to discuss what adequate safeguards are, there would be a wide range of opinions.

I cannot reassure anyone at this point as to what the criteria might be or whether the criteria would be objective. A permissive test could undermine the protection that supporters of this bill expect. An onerous or delayed process could exclude children and youth from services that could safely accommodate them. There is no automatic expiry for restrictions described as temporary and no timelines for decision-making, and the bill would not guarantee that the exemption process will even be operating when restrictions begin.

Age checks are similarly unclear. If provisions can be easily evaded, this bill gives parents false reassurance. On the other hand, a system that misclassifies an adult as a youth can shut that person out of an app that they may be perfectly entitled to use. Limits on appeals and hard-to-navigate customer service processes on social media do not help. The bill would require personal identification to be protected and deleted after age verification or estimation, but we still need to know which methods would meet the standard and how mistakes would be corrected.

The bottom line is that Canadians should not have to choose between the most reassuring interpretation of this bill and the most frightening one. The government has made an already divisive debate worse in this case by leaving central definitions and central decisions unresolved. Those who trust government may assume the regulations would deliver the protection they want. Someone who distrusts it may fear the same powers would be used against them. Unclear drafting and unresolved processes turn a debate about a law into a test of confidence in whoever administers it.

Young people should be invited to testify at committee from all perspectives so we can hear from them what they need and what they are afraid of. This bill also needs measurable safety requirements and a workable exemption process before restrictions begin. Age checks need independent testing and accessible correction when they get someone's age wrong. Victims need a clear route to urgent help when a platform fails them, while people whose lawful material is wrongfully restricted need prompt review. Parliament should require evidence showing where harm actually falls, with a firm reporting deadline so the promised review cannot drift. What I meant by that is that we should have evidence of where there is actual harm. That should be reviewable and measured, and we should be taking appropriate action to correct it.

Conservatives are willing to help. I want to be able to explain this law to the people in my communities with confidence that the outcome will match the explanation. Social media companies and others governed by this bill need to know what success looks like and what the cost of failure would be. Contrary to the remarks of my colleague, not every social media platform or app would necessarily be governed by this bill. Every social media platform may have to review the bill to determine whether it is governed by it, but it is unclear at this point whether every app would be governed.

As the bill is written right now, too much information is either fuzzy or still to come. The government ought to bring those answers to committee and either reassure Canadians or accept recommended amendments. This is about our kids, which means that it is about nothing less than the future of our country. Let us get this right.

● (2415)

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in her introduction, my colleague mentioned the importance of protecting our children, yet she spent the next 10 minutes criticizing just about everything that we included in Bill C-34 to achieve that objective. This is hardly surprising, given her voting record.

Members will recall Bill C-22, a bill that police forces had called for to make our communities safer, something that the official opposition claims it wants. When it was time for the vote, the official opposition's position on the matter was unclear. As for Bill C-16, which was intended to improve protection for victims, the opposition said that was important, but when the vote was held, it voted against the bill.

This time, my question is simple: Will my colleague support referring Bill C-34 to committee for a detailed study, or will she oppose it, as we have come to expect since she was elected?

[*English*]

Tamara Kronis: Mr. Speaker, I am not entirely sure I understand my colleague's question, or it is possible that he did not understand my speech. What I just did is what I try to do with all of the legislation that comes before us in the House. I tried to read it. I tried to understand it. Where there was a lack of clarity, I have pointed that out and invited the government to correct the record and improve the bill so we can realize the very worthy objective of it, which is to protect our kids.

● (2420)

William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for her eloquent speech. There were a lot of things in there that people need to consider. I am wondering about the implementation of some of this. It seems to me that we would be relying a lot on this online safety commission to make and implement the rules.

One thing that came to mind during her speech was false accusations. She mentioned the appeal process. Can she speak further about how she sees that as a problem that is currently absent from Bill C-34? If somebody does not like something and reports it as hate speech or something when really it is not, then a person would have to go through the whole process to get put back onto the platform. Could the hon. member elaborate a little on that?

Tamara Kronis: Mr. Speaker, I also have a lot of questions about the interpretation of how this bill would work. It has been really interesting because I have held town halls on this, and sat with groups in my community to discuss it, and we have had the chance in my community to think some of these things through. It is just unclear. A lot is being left to a process that would happen after the legislation. It is a process that parliamentarians do not typically have access to.

If my community members' concerns are to find their way into the bill, if the division and questions are to be resolved, then that is something that really has to happen in this chamber. I would invite the government to take these opportunities to listen to the questions being raised, to listen to what members of my community are saying, and to answer those questions and resolve those conflicts. It would result in better legislation.

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, my question for my colleague is simple. If she supports the objective of this bill, will she support sending it to committee so that members of Parliament can thoroughly examine it, or will she oppose it at second reading? Will she support the bill at second reading, yes or no?

[*English*]

Tamara Kronis: Mr. Speaker, the very first thing I said when I started my remarks this evening was that I support the goals of the bill. There is no one in this chamber from any party who does not support protecting kids or is not concerned about what is happening with kids online. The question here is whether or not the bill is clear enough. That is something that I expect would get debated at committee and something that witnesses would be able to provide information on.

What is somewhat distressing to me is that the government did not do these consultations upfront or did not incorporate the feedback it got into the bill so that these questions did not have to be asked.

Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, young Canadians are growing up in a digital world. They spend hours every day online, watching videos, connecting with friends, exploring ideas and posting memories of their lives. It allows them to connect, to create and to access information that was simply not possible just a generation ago. However, we must recognize a difficult reality: The modern online environment is not safe, especially for children.

Children and young people face risks online that are different from those faced by adults. Children are more vulnerable when exposed to harmful content. Increasingly, they are drawn into interactions that are targeted to their vulnerabilities, which escalate into anxiety, depression and even suicide. That is why the safe social media act has been designed to prioritize the protection of children online.

At the heart of this act is a clear principle: Platforms must take responsibility for protecting children, which applies across all regulated platforms. This includes social media and chatbot services. This duty is proactive, not reactive, and the act would establish clear and enforceable obligations by building safety measures directly into their design and operations, rather than responding only after harm occurs. This is a crucial shift from the current legislation.

Child safety is not an afterthought. It is not optional. It must become part of the standard when operating in Canada. A key pillar of the duty to protect children is an obligation to prioritize age-appropriate design, including features that protect children online. These may include default safety settings for younger users, tools that limit exposure to harmful or sensitive content, and controls that allow parents or guardians to care for younger users. Rather than relying on one specific solution, the act proposes a digital safety commission to work with experts, industry and Canadians to develop appropriate measures through regulations.

An important aspect of this is to recognize that children are not a single group. A 13-year-old, a 16-year-old and an 18-year-old do not interact with online services in the same way. Different age groups require different protections. This model is grounded in the realities of childhood development. To that end, measures should be implemented to ensure that children under the age of 16 cannot create or own accounts unless exemptions occur. This recognizes that some services, especially those built around open interaction and content sharing, may not be appropriate. At the same time, incentives for services that do innovate in safe environments must be enhanced.

A key protection in the act is children's exposure to pornographic content and ensuring that children under the age of 18 cannot access it. This type of content is explicit and is not appropriate for children. Parents should not have to worry about their children stumbling across it through social media or interacting with it via a harmful chatbot. Therefore, appropriate measures must be effective at reducing exposure, while also respecting user privacy. Hence, the bill emphasizes limiting the collection of personal information, ensuring that data collected for the purpose of age is used only for the purpose of age assurance, and ensuring that information is not retained. The bill acknowledges the need to protect children from harmful exposure, while also recognizing the importance of privacy and freedom of expression.

I also want to talk about artificial intelligence, which is becoming ever more prominent. Children are spending more and more time interacting with chatbots. Chatbots can pose unique risks to children, who are acutely vulnerable to techniques that encourage an emotional connection and trust. We have heard of incidents of chatbots sending sexually explicit content to underage users and promoting suicide or anorexia. By introducing measures that create safer interactions between children and chatbots, this bill would allow children to experience technology safely.

● (2425)

As such, across social media and AI chatbots, the bill would identify specific categories of harmful content that disproportionately affect more profoundly, and with lasting impacts, their well-being. This includes content that sexually victimizes a child or revictimizes a survivor, content that induces a child to harm themselves and content used to bully a child. Under this duty, regulated services would need to follow a specific protocol to make this type of content inaccessible on their platforms.

In parallel, the act also addresses content that induces a child to harm themselves. For example, this could include a social media post that encourages a minor to injure themselves physically to cope with stress. For children who are still developing emotionally and psychologically, exposure to this indoctrination can be especially harmful. This is particularly important in the context of emerging technologies that interact directly with users, respond to sensitive situations and influence behaviour.

Another critical area of concern is cyber-bullying. Social media platforms can contribute to the spread and escalation of cyber-bullying. The viral spread of hurtful posts can magnify the emotional impact on victims and can turn a single incident into widespread public humiliation. This type of content jeopardizes the ability of a child to fully express themselves online. To be clear, the definition used for bullying a child in the act targets content where there is an intention to threaten, intimidate or humiliate a child that could cause serious harm to their physical or mental health.

The commission would provide guidelines on understanding the threshold of content that is reasonably perceived as threatening, intimidating or humiliating. For example, a group of 16-year-olds might create an Instagram account devoted to mocking a student, including posting photos or making fun of their appearance and abilities to exclude them from social events. Such content can spread through reposting. In this example, the child being bullied online could experience long-lasting humiliation, social isolation and depression. The platform would have an obligation to reduce users' exposure to that content, breaking the cycle of engagement and exposure to harm.

The safe social media act would establish a comprehensive approach to protect children online. It recognizes children's vulnerability. It would set clear expectations and obligations for platforms. It would build a system that is proactive, adaptable and accountable. This bill would take meaningful strides to create a safer online world for young Canadians.

Children are spending more of their lives on the Internet, and we accept that. This bill does not intend to prevent children from having access to valuable information or positive social experiences online. The goal is to make the online environment as safe as possible for them to explore. The duty we share, all of us in this House, is to protect children. The act would do just that.

● (2430)

William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I heard a lot in my hon. colleague's speech. He said that the act would this and that, but from my understanding, it is the goal of the act to do those things while leaving a lot to the commission to figure out how to actually get there. Maybe the member can explain to me how he sees the bill doing these things, rather than setting goals for the commission to do them without parliamentary oversight once the legislation leaves here.

Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, it is important for the House to set the tone and parameters by which we should proceed, but as with any other regulatory body, we would depend upon experts and those who execute the act to provide the appropriate parameters and safeguards to protect our children.

Michael Coteau (Scarborough—Woburn, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the member spent a lot of time in the Ontario legislature, and of course education is a provincial matter. Beyond the goals and aspirations of this bill, what role can provincial governments play through the education system to help increase digital literacy to help prevent harm for young people?

Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, I have had the pleasure of working with my colleague over many years. I know that from his time as minister of children and youth, he has an acute awareness of the vulnerability that our children have. There are a lot of predators out there. We have a lot of activity that is lawful but awful, and we must do everything we are able to do through provincial authorities to ensure that the act is implemented to protect every child throughout Canada.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned the importance of ensuring effective online protection for children, while also safeguarding data privacy and the freedom of expression.

I would like to hear his thoughts on how this bill strikes the right balance between these concerns, while ensuring that children are adequately protected from online harms.

Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, it is important that every determination we make in the House abides by our Constitution and the right to freedom of expression. The act would not prohibit that. It is putting forward parameters to safeguard the most vulnerable in our society, who are underage, so they are not exposed to harmful incidents that predators are taking hold of at this time. Our expressions of freedom, the freedom that is enabled through our Constitution, will always prevail.

● (2435)

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague why it is important to act now. I think there was an expectation among the Canadian population to do that. When I speak with people in my riding, some are asking how we can better protect our children. There are some concerns about what they are seeing on social media, so I would like to hear his view on what he has heard in his riding and why it is important to act now with Bill C-34.

Charles Sousa: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct in stating what is implicit in this act, which is that the duty and responsibility for children falls to their parents, but parents are looking for support. They are looking for ways that enable them to provide support. Colleagues and individuals have called me, like lawyers in the community who are extremely engaged and affluent in what they do. One has a wife who is the president and CEO of a major corporation in Ontario. They are concerned that their 11-year-old twins are being exposed to content that they do not always have the ability to oversee. This act would be a supplement to support parents as well.

William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-34, the safe social media act, and to how we can protect our children online while preserving the rights, freedoms and privacy of all Canadians.

Before entering public life, I spent 26 years as an accountant. My work required me to examine details, identify risks and ensure that decisions were supported by sound evidence. In accounting, good intentions are important but they are not enough. If assumptions are wrong, controls are inadequate and accountability is missing, the results can be very different from what was intended. The same principle applies to this legislation.

When it comes to protecting our children, we cannot afford to get the details wrong. As a member of Parliament for a rural riding, I regularly hear from parents and grandparents, educators and community members concerned about what children encounter online. These are real concerns raised around kitchen tables and in school hallways by families trying to do what is best for their children. Canadians want to know how they will protect their children from online predators and prevent harmful content from reaching them, and how technology companies can be held accountable. They also want to know how we can address these problems without creating new ones. Those are questions the House must consider as Bill C-34 moves through Parliament.

The online environment has changed dramatically over the past generation. When I was growing up, a problem at school often stayed in the schoolyard. Today, an embarrassing picture, a cruel message or a video can be shared thousands of times in minutes. Cyber-bullying can follow a child home, strangers can contact young people directly and harmful content can appear without them ever searching for it. With the growing use of artificial intelligence, children are also interacting with chatbots without necessarily understanding the risks or consequences. These experiences have a devastating effect. Statistics Canada has reported that one in four Canadian youth aged 12 to 17 has experienced cyberbullying.

The question is not whether children deserve protection; they absolutely do. The question is whether Bill C-34 would provide the protection effectively and proportionately while respecting Canadian rights. Parents can set rules and supervise device use and teach their children about online dangers but they cannot control the algorithms that determine what appears on screen, prevent every stranger from making contact or remove harmful content from platforms used by millions. Tech companies have responsibilities too. If a platform encourages endless scrolling, recommends increasingly disturbing content and fails to respond adequately when children are exposed, Canadians deserve answers. Companies should explain what they are doing, how quickly they respond and how their results are measured. Conservatives believe that technology companies must be held meaningfully accountable for the environments they create.

Bill C-34 would propose requirements relating to safe design, age verification, harmful content complaints and transparency. It would also establish a digital safety commission of Canada to oversee and enforce those requirements. These are important objectives, but many practical details will depend on regulations developed after the legislation passes. What constitutes a safe design? How would effectiveness be measured? What evidence would demonstrate that children are actually safer rather than simply that the companies have changed their policies on paper?

After 26 years in accounting, I know that accountability requires clear standards, reliable information and a way to verify results. Should we not expect the same from legislation intended to protect our children?

We must also examine the proposed restrictions on social media accounts for those under 16. Australia's experience with age-based restrictions raised important questions about compliance, workarounds and young users moving between platforms. How can the government demonstrate that Canada's approach will produce better results?

● (2440)

We must consider whether young people will use virtual private networks or other technologies to bypass restrictions. If the goal is to protect children, we need to know whether these measures would reduce exposure to harm or simply push it elsewhere.

We must also consider the scope of the legislation. Children face online risks through gaming, messaging, livestreaming, and, increasingly, through artificial intelligence tools, not just traditional social media. Parents have raised concerns about online games where children can communicate with strangers. Would these environments be adequately addressed? How would the government determine which services fall within the rules? How would it prevent children from migrating to platforms with fewer safeguards? These questions deserve answers before we assume that the proposed framework would solve the problems.

Protecting children and protecting privacy are not competing goals. We must be able to do both. If platforms would be required to verify users' ages, what information would they collect? Would Canadians need to provide government identification, biometric data or other sensitive personal information? How would that be stored? How long would it be retained? What would prevent it from being used for other purposes? What would happen if it is exposed by a data breach? Canadians hear about data breaches and compromised data far too often, and a system designed to protect children must not expose children or adults to new privacy risks. We should explore age verification methods that minimize the collection and storage of personal information with strong safeguards and independent verification.

My professional background taught me that protecting sensitive information requires clear controls and accountability. Those safeguards are essential to public confidence. The same principles apply to the proposed digital safety commission. The commission would have significant authority to develop guidelines, investigate complaints, conduct inspections, issue compliance orders and impose monetary penalties.

That is considerable regulatory power, and it would need to be accompanied by strong checks and balances. How would Canadians challenge decisions they believe are unfair? What independent review would be available? How would procedural fairness be guaranteed? How would Parliament maintain actual oversight? These are not just technical questions. They concern how authority works within a free and democratic society. We need to be particularly careful when decisions about online content could affect legal expression.

Online safety cannot rest with parents alone, but neither should it be the exclusive responsibility of government bureaucrats. Technology companies need to take responsibility for the systems they build and operate. They should be transparent about the risks their services create and the steps they take to address them. Parents need practical tools to guide their children's online experiences. Law enforcement needs the tools to pursue people who exploit and abuse children. Parliament must ensure that any regulatory framework is clearly defined and proportionate, and that it has the proper mechanisms for meaningful accountability.

We should also learn from previous legislative efforts, including the stated objectives of Bill C-11 and Bill C-63. However worthwhile and grand they seem, this must never prevent us from scrutinizing a bill's mechanisms, consequences and the powers it would create.

If, as I expect, Bill C-34 proceeds to committee, we will have an opportunity to hear from a wide variety of witnesses, including parents, child safety experts, privacy specialists, social media companies, law enforcement, and legal experts. We should examine the evidence, identify gaps and pursue practical improvements. Above all, we should determine whether these measures would work, whether they could be enforced, whether they would protect privacy and whether they would make children safer in their everyday lives. We need to take the time to make sure we do this right.

● (2445)

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, throughout the evening, we heard all of our colleagues talk about a common goal: We all want to better protect children online, on both sides of the House. Some members felt that some aspects of the bill could be improved, but I think we all agree on the objective of Bill C-34.

If we agree on the objective, which is to better protect children online, I would like my colleague to tell us clearly whether he plans to vote in favour of Bill C-34 at second reading in order to refer it to committee.

[*English*]

William Stevenson: Mr. Speaker, I think the intent and the goals are agreed to by everybody in Parliament. There are a lot of questions that are still left unanswered, and I do believe we will want this bill to go to committee to answer those questions and develop what is missing. I am fully supportive of it going to committee to get those questions answered.

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, my colleague said that the bill has room for improvement, but he also said that he wants it to be passed at second reading so it can go to committee.

What worthwhile improvements does he see in the bill? If he intends to support it at second reading, then he must believe it contains positive measures.

[*English*]

William Stevenson: Mr. Speaker, with regard to positive things, it is addressing the concerns of many parents. We need to give them some of the tools. We need to make sure the legislation is appropriate and proportionate to what the goals are to help parents going forward.

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague laid out a number of ways that the bill could be improved and a number of things that the government should pay attention to in moving forward.

I would like to ask my colleague to share a bit more about what he is hearing in his community and the concerns various groups may have.

William Stevenson: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit this is not the major issue that I am hearing in my riding. There are a lot of concerns about everything today with regard to being in Alberta. We have had referendum issues, which have sucked all the energy out of the room for quite a while.

Parents talk to me about what we are looking at in the future, but they are always concerned that if there is going to be overreach, how these restrictions are going to affect the rest of society versus the balancing act with regard to protecting our children.

● (2450)

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will ask the same question that my colleague asked our colleague earlier.

Will the Conservatives vote in favour of the bill in order to support parents who are struggling and who are concerned about the dangers children face online?

[*English*]

William Stevenson: Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are concerned about protecting children and getting this bill to committee to flesh out a lot of the details so that a lot of the questions we have will be answered and resolved going forward in this legislation.

[*Translation*]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe if you seek it, you will find unanimous consent to see the clock at 1:13 a.m.

[*English*]

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

FINANCE

Tamara Kronis (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on May 1, I asked how many food bank expansions the Liberal government needed to see before it would bring grocery bills down. The minister responded by citing the Canada groceries and essentials benefit and temporary fuel tax relief. Well, those measures do not seem to have helped. Nearly six months later, families in my community still need an answer about the price of food. Last week, Food Banks Canada released its latest "Hungercount Report". It recorded more than 2.35 million food bank visits in March of this year, which is more than double the number in 2019 and up 9% since last year across the country. In B.C., visits rose by 14% compared to the previous March. Behind those numbers are people who are struggling to make their paycheques, pensions and disability benefits cover the essentials. The latest Statistics Canada figures show that grocery prices are 33% higher than they were in September 2020. Of course, the wages and benefits have not kept up with that increase.

I recognize that the grocery benefit does help eligible households, that fuel tax relief has been extended as Conservatives requested and that people do need that breathing room, but the government has to explain how it will reduce the underlying costs of getting food onto the shelves. The answer cannot be a never-ending stream of cheques and an ever-lengthening lineup at food banks. For Vancouver Island, that means working with us on improving the infrastructure that supports our supply chains and paying attention to freight, cold storage and distribution. It also means making it easy for local farmers and independent grocers to reach customers. It means removing unnecessary federal costs and barriers, while protecting food safety and strengthening competition.

The government has now opened applications for its $1 billion food-link fund. It says that this will improve distribution and lower food costs. Given the ineffectiveness of earlier measures, I would feel better if we had clear deadlines and measurable results.

Will the parliamentary secretary commit tonight to public reporting on whether the fund meets its approval deadlines when projects begin operating and whether they lower distribution costs for island communities? Beyond that fund, which federal costs will the government remove to make producing and transporting food more affordable?

A $1-billion commitment deserves a clear accounting of what it will deliver. Families should be able to judge the results at the grocery store. The government owes all Canadians a plan that reduces the need for that help. Once again, we find that these plans are short on details in many ways. They are short on key performance indicators, and we lack confidence that they will produce measurable results.

When will families in Nanaimo—Ladysmith and across this country finally see lasting relief in their grocery bills?

● (2455)

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.): Mr. Speaker, we know that Canadians are struggling with the cost of living. Of course, we also know that the oil price shock is what is driving the consumer price index up. The consumer price index would be at 2.4% if it were not for the rise in energy prices that has driven it up to 3.1%. That directly impacts the cost of food over time, and we see that the inflation of food prices is significant and elevated.

That is exactly why we have given families a boost today and a bridge to tomorrow. That includes helping both with more emergency or immediate relief and support, which includes a billion-dollar investment, and making the national school food program permanent. It also includes the groceries and essentials benefit. I am glad to hear the member opposite acknowledge that those programs really help people. Often we hear from the Conservatives that they do not acknowledge them. They call the national school food program "garbage" or claim that it does not serve any food to children, when we know in fact that is false. I have witnessed it with my own eyes when I have toured food programs in my riding.

We have also moved forward on a national food security strategy, which is significant at $3.2 billion. Previously, we never had what I would say is a medium- to long-term strategy to address the structural problems in the food system. We have had numerous reports done by the Competition Bureau that looked at corporate consolidation within the food system all along the supply chains. The reality is that this leaves our food system vulnerable to shocks in the global market.

Commodity prices affect the input costs for our farmers, the cost of transportation and distribution, and the costs for our retailers, all of whom assume some of those costs and eventually pass them down to consumers in raised prices at the grocery store. Therefore, over time, having a food system that is vulnerable and highly dependent upon global supply chains is not the most resilient strategy. What we are doing is investing in the infrastructure that communities need in order to be able to distribute food and to develop shorter supply chains and more sustainable regional food systems that have cold storage and distribution, that do value added.

On Vancouver Island, in Victoria and the surrounding areas, there is much activity in the food system. I have toured it and met with many of the groups in the past. Before I was in politics, I served on the board of Food Secure Canada, an organization that has advocated for sustainable local food systems. This national food security strategy is something I have advocated for since entering politics seven years ago.

I am very proud to stand with a government that is making a $3.2-billion investment into the structural challenges in the food system, to develop the infrastructure and capacity at the community scale, to develop more resilience and essentially create competition so independent grocery stores would be able to get access to local food and do it in a more affordable way that is somewhat insulated from the commodity price fluctuations that have made our food system quite vulnerable to shocks.

Tamara Kronis: Mr. Speaker, I was glad to hear the parliamentary secretary acknowledge the drivers behind some of the increases in the consumer price index in this country, the CPI, but the reality is that the price of food continues to grow at an inflationary rate that exceeds the CPI. The government comes up with program after program, yet there is a lack of measurables, KPIs and clear targets they can be measured against. Given that in the parliamentary secretary's own community demand has become so intense that last year there had to be incredible expansion in the number of slots, my question is this: How will these programs work, by how much and by when, and how will Canadians know that this billion-dollar fund actually lowered their costs?

● (2500)

Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Speaker, again, it is more than just a billion-dollar fund. It is $3.2 billion. The local food infrastructure fund has already made a significant difference in my community. There are organizations, mostly non-profits and charities, in my community that offer solutions at a community scale to the food insecurity challenges we see rising in our communities. They are doing a great job. What we are doing is boosting their efforts by offering more financing and support directly from the federal government, which arguably is something we have not had before and is probably the missing piece to really addressing the root causes of food insecurity.

Every expert in the country will tell us that food insecurity is the direct result of income insecurity. Therefore, really, the long-term solution to food insecurity is to make sure we have high-paying jobs in Canada. Wages have been outpacing inflation in Canada. The Canadian economy has added twice the number of jobs—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The hon. member for Yellowhead has the floor.

THE ECONOMY

William Stevenson (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening to follow up on a question I asked earlier in the year about the affordability crisis facing Canadians and the government's costly decisions. When Canadians are working full-time but cannot afford a home, when families are struggling to pay for groceries and rent, and when people are forced to make impossible choices just to get by, Canadians deserve more than a government pointing to economic indicators and good news. They deserve responsible spending, meaningful actions and a government that understands the consequences of its decisions.

As a chartered professional accountant for 26 years with tax experience, I understand the importance of fiscal responsibility. Budgets must balance priorities, spending must deliver results, and every dollar of taxpayer money must be treated with respect. Responsible budgeting is not simply about cutting costs. It is about understanding what we are losing when we make those cuts.

What has been top of mind in recent days are the Liberals' cuts to national parks. We learned late last week that Parks Canada is discontinuing its search and rescue dog program in Banff National Park, a program that has been essential for more than 55 years. The program has helped locate missing people, find avalanche victims, recover those lost in the mountains and support law enforcement locally. One of these dogs, Leroy, helped find more than 57 people during his career. These are not just numbers on a spreadsheet. These are people who were brought home to their families because of the dedication and specialized skills of these dogs and their handlers.

Banff and Jasper are among Canada's most treasured national spaces. They attract visitors from across the country and around the world. As visitation grows, and demands on our parks increase, especially with the Canada strong pass, we should be strengthening the tools that help people be safe, not eliminating proven capabilities in the name of savings.

This decision raises a serious question. What is the true cost of cutting a program that helps save lives? The concerns do not end there. Parks Canada is now undertaking another round of workforce adjustments. The agency expects to eliminate the equivalent of roughly 500 full-time positions as part of its federal spending reductions, totalling nearly $145 million over the next three years. These are the people who maintain trails and facilities, protect wildlife, support visitors, preserve our national heritage and help communities recover from disasters.

In Jasper, where the community and the park continue to recover from the devastating 2024 wildfire, Parks Canada employees are still doing essential rebuilding work while facing uncertainty about their own futures. These are not positions that can be written off as cost savings measures. When experienced employees leave, specialized programs disappear. We are losing institutional knowledge, frontline capacity and the ability to respond effectively when emergencies happen.

Canadians expect their government to find savings, eliminate waste and live within its means. Conservatives believe in that responsibility. However, cutting essential services and jeopardizing skilled careers is not good management.

Affordability matters. Canadians need relief from the cost of living, and taxpayers deserve value for money, but affordability controls cannot become an excuse for decisions that put livelihoods at risk or compromise the safety—

● (2505)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The hon. parliamentary secretary has the floor.

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.): Mr. Speaker, I fully acknowledge that Jasper National Park and Banff National Park are real treasures in our country. I have visited Banff National Park and absolutely love Parks Canada and the work that it does to preserve natural spaces, and allow people to enjoy those spaces and experience the outdoors in Canada. Canada has so much to offer the world and visitors, as well as the people who live in our great country. In terms of geography and natural wonders, we have unlimited experiences for people to take advantage of. I am glad to hear the member opposite advocate for something that he is passionate about. I empathize with him.

At the same time, the member cannot have it both ways. He cannot have his cake and eat it too. On the one hand, the member opposite has said he wants fiscal discipline, but then he disagrees with the comprehensive expenditure review that our government has done. I think it was a demonstration of fiscal responsibility. We went through a pretty comprehensive exercise to look at ways to reduce government operational spending. It was a $60-billion savings exercise to achieve optimization within government operations, and that includes reductions that the member opposite is pointing to. He just does not like where those decisions are being made. However, I think he would agree that it is important for governments to do vertical and horizontal reviews, to review where there can be savings made and where government operations can be optimized, and that is a good practice for us to undertake.

Simultaneously, to demonstrate fiscal discipline, we have reported $11 billion less of a deficit in the spring economic update. We just recently announced that we will be meeting the target for one of our fiscal anchors a year in advance, which is to balance our operational budget or spending with revenues. That is significant progress. I understand that there is more work to do on that, but it has created some fiscal room as well for the government to take some of these tax measures and make cuts that we have made. Significantly, we have cut taxes on income, housing, fuel and new business investment.

Surely the member opposite can understand the significance of those things, given his many speeches and interventions on the cost of living challenges and affordability challenges that Canadians are going through, not to mention the Conservative Party's repeated requests for cutting taxes. I am sure that he supports those measures.

Is he saying, on the one hand, that we should cut and exercise fiscal discipline but not do it in a way that impacts anybody in his riding, or is he broadly supportive of those? I cannot understand the logic here.

I think that we are demonstrating fiscal discipline. We are strategically investing in the economy. We are putting in place measures that give Canadians a boost today and a bridge to tomorrow, which is how we think about it. People need to get through the challenges they are facing today with the economic shocks that we are under, but really have hope for a future where they know that the government is working hard to create prosperity for Canadians for generations to come. That is exactly what we will stay focused on.

William Stevenson: Mr. Speaker, I want to first say that this is all about decisions. We can look at a lot of the choices that are made with regard to Parks Canada. Last year, it gave $2 million worth of bonuses to executives and paid over $400,000 in catering. This is all about decisions. Meanwhile, the Canada strong pass reduced the amount of fees that were collected from those who were visiting, so that reduced the actual income. That is a choice that affects spending.

Regarding the rescue dog program in Banff, when I first heard about this decision, I knew immediately that this was something that needed to be addressed right now, before we have deep snow and an increased risk of avalanches. We have received dozens of emails and calls already and have thousands of signatures on an e-petition that was only started yesterday. This is not a cost-saving measure.

Will the government commit to reinstating the rescue dog program in Banff?

● (2510)

Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Speaker, our plan is focused and disciplined. We are acting where we can make the most difference, by maintaining fiscal sustainability and discipline, and making targeted investments that benefit Canadians right across the country. That means reducing the operating deficit, meeting our fiscal anchors and ensuring public funds support growth, resilience and the well-being of Canadians.

I appreciate the member opposite's comments and his commitment to that particular program in his jurisdiction. As he said, quite rightly, it is about decision-making. The Government of Canada is doing its very best to make the best decisions for the greatest number of Canadians, and pursue the prosperity and the strength in our economy that all Canadians want to see.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (John Nater): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until later this day at 10 a.m., pursuant to standing order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 1:11 a.m.)

CONTENTS

Wednesday, October 28, 2026

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

British Columbia Election
McKinnon ... 10877

Luc Brodeur-Jourdain
Hardy ... 10877

Human Rights in Iran
Sgro ... 10877

***Oxi* Day**
Menegakis ... 10878

Community Leader in Mississauga East—Cooksville
Fonseca ... 10878

Drug Use Program in Edmonton
Diotte ... 10878

Oxi Day
Lambropoulos ... 10878

Employment
Gill (Windsor West) ... 10878

Société de recherches historiques de Pointe des cascades
DeBellefeuille ... 10879

Maryam Muritala
Sodhi ... 10879

Finance
Majumdar ... 10879

Small Craft Harbours
Morrissey ... 10879

The Economy
Roberts ... 10880

Tourism
Fortier ... 10880

Oil and Gas Industry
McKenzie ... 10880

Student Leaders
O'Rourke ... 10880

ORAL QUESTIONS

Finance
Poilievre ... 10880
Carney ... 10881
Poilievre ... 10881
Carney ... 10881
Poilievre ... 10881
Carney ... 10881
Poilievre ... 10881
Carney ... 10881
Poilievre ... 10881
Carney ... 10881

Intergovernmental Relations
Blanchet ... 10882
Carney ... 10882
Blanchet ... 10882
Carney ... 10882
Blanchet ... 10882
Carney ... 10882

Taxation
Poilievre ... 10882
Champagne ... 10882
Poilievre ... 10882
Hodgson ... 10883
Poilievre ... 10883
Hodgson ... 10883
Poilievre ... 10883
Champagne ... 10883

Finance
Poilievre ... 10883
Champagne ... 10883
Poilievre ... 10883
Champagne ... 10883

Intergovernmental Affairs
Poilievre ... 10883
Lightbound ... 10884
Simard ... 10884
Lightbound ... 10884
Simard ... 10884
Lightbound ... 10884

Finance
Cobena ... 10884
Solomon ... 10884
Cobena ... 10884
Solomon ... 10885
Chambers ... 10885
Valdez ... 10885
Vien ... 10885
MacKinnon ... 10885
Vien ... 10885
Gainey ... 10885

Steel and Aluminum Industry
Danko ... 10885
Joly ... 10886
Guglielmin ... 10886
Joly ... 10886
Kuruc ... 10886
Joly ... 10886

Kuruc ... 10886
Joly ... 10886

The Economy
Chong ... 10887
MacKinnon ... 10887
Chong ... 10887
MacKinnon ... 10887
Hallan ... 10887
Long ... 10887
Hallan ... 10887
Long ... 10887

Finance
Paul-Hus ... 10887
Champagne ... 10888
Paul-Hus ... 10888
MacKinnon ... 10888
Martin ... 10888
Long ... 10888

Natural Resources
Thomas ... 10888
Hodgson ... 10888
Thomas ... 10888
Hodgson ... 10888
Kibble ... 10889
MacKinnon ... 10889

Labour
Chang ... 10889
Gainey ... 10889

Parks Canada
Stevenson ... 10889
Grant ... 10889

Labour
Gazan ... 10889
MacKinnon ... 10889

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Appearance of the Prime Minister before the Standing Committee on Finance
Motion ... 10890
Motion negatived ... 10891

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Concurrence in Committee Reports

Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities
Motion for concurrence ... 10891
Motion agreed to ... 10893

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Canada Labour Code
Bill C-247. Second reading ... 10893
Motion negatived ... 10894

National Strategy on Flood and Drought Forecasting Act
Bill C-241. Third reading ... 10894
Motion agreed to ... 10895
(Bill read the third time and passed) ... 10895

An Act to Repeal Certain Restrictions on Shipping
Bill C-264. Second reading ... 10895
Motion negatived ... 10897

Relieving Grieving Parents of an Administrative Burden Act (Evan's Law)
Bill C-222. Third reading ... 10897
Motion agreed to ... 10898
(Bill read the third time and passed) ... 10898

Points of Order

Bill C-41—Proposal to Apply Standing Order 69.1
Lawton ... 10898
Lamoureux ... 10900

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House

National Defence
Sousa ... 10900

Petitions

Foreign Affairs
Ehsassi ... 10900

Protection of Deep Seabeds
Deschênes ... 10900

Intimate Partner Violence
Dowdall ... 10900

Wood Preservatives
Dalton ... 10901

Questions on the Order Paper
Lamoureux ... 10901

Motions for Papers
Lamoureux ... 10901

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Safe Social Media Act
Bill C-34. Second reading ... 10901
Lamoureux ... 10901
Deschênes ... 10902
Genuis ... 10902
Grant ... 10903
Lantsman ... 10903
Lamoureux ... 10904

Dalton ... 10905
Blanchette-Joncas ... 10905
Konanz ... 10905
Lamoureux ... 10907
Blanchette-Joncas ... 10907
Gill (Windsor West) ... 10907

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Protecting Young Persons from Exposure to Pornography Act
Bill S-209. Second reading ... 10907
Deschênes ... 10907
Patzer ... 10908
Villeneuve ... 10910
Melillo ... 10911
Fancy ... 10912
Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake) ... 10914
(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee) ... 10915

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Safe Social Media Act
Bill C-34. Second reading ... 10915
Gould ... 10915
Bardeesy ... 10916
Garon ... 10916
Hardy ... 10916
Carr ... 10917
Deschênes ... 10918
Lamoureux ... 10918
Hardy ... 10919
Lavoie ... 10920
Deltell ... 10921
Cody ... 10921
MacDonald (Cardigan) ... 10923
Lavoie ... 10923
Lamoureux ... 10924
Nguyen ... 10924
May ... 10926
Valdez ... 10926
Lavoie ... 10926
Lamoureux ... 10926
Rochefort ... 10926
Rempel Garner ... 10928
Valdez ... 10928
Rempel Garner ... 10928
Rempel Garner ... 10928
Lavoie ... 10930
Lamoureux ... 10930
Gill (Brampton West) ... 10931
Valdez ... 10932
Rempel Garner ... 10933
Lavoie ... 10933
Martin ... 10933
Gill (Brampton West) ... 10935
Hepfner ... 10935
May ... 10935
Church ... 10936
Jackson ... 10937
Bardeesy ... 10937
May ... 10938
Jackson ... 10938
Coteau ... 10940
Roberts ... 10940
Joseph ... 10940
Lamoureux ... 10940
Roberts ... 10940
Greaves ... 10942
Jackson ... 10942
Coteau ... 10942
Miedema ... 10942
Genuis ... 10944
May ... 10944
Coteau ... 10944
Sawatzky ... 10944
Genuis ... 10946
May ... 10946
Joseph ... 10946
Genuis ... 10947
Deschênes-Thériault ... 10949
Fergus ... 10949
May ... 10950
Lamoureux ... 10950
Greaves ... 10950
Ntumba ... 10951
Deschênes-Thériault ... 10952
Coteau ... 10952
Joseph ... 10953
Coteau ... 10953
May ... 10954
Joseph ... 10955
Deschênes-Thériault ... 10955
Coteau ... 10956
Bardeesy ... 10957
Stevenson ... 10957
Joseph ... 10957
Bardeesy ... 10958
Stevenson ... 10959
Deschênes-Thériault ... 10959
Kronis ... 10960
Bittle ... 10960
Deschênes-Thériault ... 10961
Stevenson ... 10961
Begum ... 10962
Greaves ... 10962
Grant ... 10963
Stevenson ... 10964
Deschênes-Thériault ... 10964
Turnbull ... 10964
Grant ... 10966
Stevenson ... 10966

Kronis 10966
Kronis 10966
Deschênes-Thériault 10968
Stevenson 10968
Sousa 10969
Stevenson 10970
Coteau 10970
Deschênes-Thériault 10970
Stevenson 10971
Deschênes-Thériault 10972
Kronis 10972
Joseph 10973

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Finance
Kronis 10973
Turnbull 10973

The Economy
Stevenson 10974
Turnbull 10975

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